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THE QUEENS OF KUNGAHÄLLA



THE GENERAL'S RING

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THE QUEENS OF KUNGAHÄLLA

BY

SELMA LAGERLÖF

TRANSLATED BY

C. FIELD



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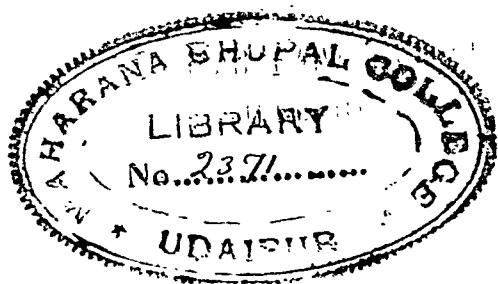
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LAGERLOF, SELMA, Dr Phil. (Hon.); authoress, *b* at estate Marbacka in Vermland, Sweden, 20 Nov 1858; *d* of E G Lagerlof, Officer in the Army, Estate-owner *Edmo* Royal Women's Superior Training College, Stockholm. Teacher at the Girls' High School at Landskrona, 1885-88, received a prize in a literary journal for some chapters of Gösta Berling's Saga, 1890, devoted herself entirely to authorship after 1893; created Doctor *honoris causa* at the Linnæus Jubilee at the Upsala University, 1907, received the Nobel Prize in Literature at Stockholm, 1909, member of the Swedish Academy, 1914. *Publications* Gösta Berling, 1891, Invisible Links, 1901, Miracles of Antikrist, 1897, From a Swedish Homestead, 1899; Queens of Kungälv and other Sketches, 1899, Jerusalem, 1901, Herr Arne's Hoard, 1904, Legends of Christ, 1904, The Adventures of Nils, 1906, The Girl from the Marsh, 1908, Emperor of Portugallia, 1914, Short Stories, 1915, The Outcast, 1918, Zachris Topelius, 1920, Marbacka, The Tale of a Manor, 1923, The General's Ring, 1925, Charlotte Löwensköld, 1925, entrusted by the Association of Common Schools' Teachers with the writing of a book of Sweden for primary schools, which task she performed in The Adventures of Nils. *Recreations* has spent some years in travelling in most countries in Europe, in Egypt, and in Palestine. *Address* Marbacka, Sunne, Sweden — 'Who's Who.'

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BY SELMA LAGERLÖF

JERUSALEM, *A Novel*

GIRL FROM THE MARSH CROFT

THE HOLY CITY, *Jerusalem II*

MÄRBACKA

CHARLOTTE LÖWENSKÖLD

THE GENERAL'S RING

THE TALE OF A MANOR

THE QUEENS OF KUNGAHÄLLA

T. WERNER LAURIE LTD.

PREFACE

IF anyone who had heard tell of the old town Kungahälla were to visit the site by the Nordre River, where it once stood, he would certainly be much astonished. He would ask himself whether churches and castles could melt away like snow, or whether the earth had opened her mouth to swallow them. He has come to a place where in former times stood a mighty city, and he finds not a single street nor a wharf remaining. He can see neither heaps of ruins nor signs of conflagration; all he finds is a manor-house surrounded by green trees and red barns. He can see only fields and

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meadows, where the plough traces furrows year after year without being checked by foundation-walls or stone-paved courtyards.

It can be well imagined that the first point such a traveller would make for will be the river-bank. He will, of course, not expect to find there any of the great ships who sailed to the harbours of the Baltic and to distant Spain, but he will hope to see some trace of the old wharves, of the great boat-houses and bridges, to find some of the great ovens where the salt used to be dried, or to see the worn stone pavement in the street which led to the harbour. He inquires about the German Wharf and the Swedish Wharf, and wants to see the Weepers' Wharf where the women of Kungahälla used to bid farewell to their husbands and sons when they went on distant voyages. But when he comes down to the river-

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bank he sees nothing but the waving reeds, a cart-road full of holes leading down to the ferry, some rickety rowing-boats, and a little flat ferry-boat carrying over a peasant's cart to Hisingen, but no large vessels glide gently up the river; he cannot even see any dark wreckage lying and mouldering away beneath the waters.

Since he can find nothing noteworthy near the harbour, he may perhaps try to discover the famous Hill of the Convent. He would probably like to see traces of the palisades and walls which once surrounded it, as well as the high castle and the long line of Convent buildings. He would say to himself that there must be left at least some remains of the splendid church in which the miracle-working Cross, which had been brought from Jerusalem, was preserved. He thinks of the quantity of monuments which cover sacred hills

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elsewhere, and tower over other ancient sites, and his heart begins to beat with joyful expectancy. But when he comes to the old hill which overlooks some cultivated fields, he finds nothing but some rustling trees. He will find no walls nor trees nor gables with pointed windows. Garden-seats and chairs indeed he will see under the trees, but no pillared cloister nor well-hewn grave-stones.

Since he has found nothing here, he will perhaps begin to inquire after the old royal palace. He will perhaps think of the great halls from which Kungahälla has received its name. Perhaps there may still be found some remains of the yard-thick timber of the walls, or of the deep cellars under the great hall where the Norwegian kings used to hold their feasts. He thinks of the green lawn of the palace where the kings broke in silver-hoofed foals and the

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queens milked golden-horned cows, of the lofty maidens' chamber, of the brewing-house with the huge coppers, of the great kitchen where half an ox was put into the cauldron at once, and whole swine revolved on the spit. He thinks of the house of the serfs and the falcons' aviary and the store-houses, one building after the other surrounding the courtyard, mossgrown with age, and adorned with dragons' heads. Something must remain, he thinks, of such a number of buildings. But when he asks for the old royal palace, he is conducted to a country-house with a glass veranda and a winter-garden. The seat of honour has disappeared, and so have all silver-plated drinking-horns and shields covered with ox-hide. They cannot even point out to him the smooth lawn with the narrow paths trodden out in the black soil. He sees strawberry beds and rose plantations,

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merry children and young girls who play under apple and pear trees, but nowhere can he see champions who wrestle or knights who play at shuttlecock.

Perhaps he asks for the oak in the market-place, where the kings held their councils, and where the twelve Judgment Stones were erected, or for the long street which was said to extend for miles, or for the rich merchants' houses which were divided by dark alleys and all of which possessed wharves and boat-houses down by the river, or for the Church of the Virgin in the market-place where seafarers made votive offerings of small rigged-out ships, and those who were in trouble, little hearts of silver.

But no one will be able to show him anything. Cows and sheep pasture where the long street once ran. Rye and oats grow in the market-place,

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and cattle-stalls and barns stand where formerly crowds pressed round enticing booths.

Without doubt this will trouble him much. "Is there then nothing left?" he will say. "Have they nothing they can show me?" And he will be inclined to think that they have deceived him, and that it is impossible that the great Kungahälla ever stood here at all. It must have been somewhere else.

Then they will take him down to the river-side and show him a roughly hewn block of stone. They will scrape off the silver-grey lichen, so that he can see that figures have been engraved on the stone. He will not be able to understand at all what they represent, they will be as unmeaning to him as the spots on the moon's disk. But he will be assured that these engravings represent a ship and an elk-deer, and that they were made in early times

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to commemorate the first founding of the city. And since he is as far from comprehension as ever, they will tell him what the rock-carvings signify.

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THE FOREST QUEEN

SILVIUS ANTONIUS POPPIUS was a well-to-do Roman merchant. He carried on trade with distant lands, and from the harbour of Ostia he dispatched well-equipped triremes to Spain, Britain, and even the north coasts of Germany. Fortune favoured him; he amassed an incredible amount of wealth, and rejoiced at the prospect of bequeathing it to his only son. Unfortunately the latter had not inherited his father's capacity. The whole world teems with such instances. A rich man's only son! Is it necessary to say more? The story has so often been repeated.

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One might be inclined to believe that the gods give as sons to the rich men these intolerable sluggards, these dull, pale, tired dolts, in order to demonstrate to men the boundless folly of heaping up wealth. When will men open their eyes? When will they begin to take to heart the lessons of the gods?

The young Silvius Antonius Poppius by the time he was twenty had tasted all the enjoyments of life. He professed to be tired of them all, but none the less no one noticed any abatement in the zeal with which he pursued them. On the contrary he fell into complete despair when an obstinate strange series of misfortunes, which suddenly began to persecute him, upset his life of ease. His Numidian horses became lame the day before the most important driving-match of the year, his illicit amours were discovered, his most skilful cook died of marsh-fever. This was

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more than enough to break a strength of mind which had not been hardened by toil and exertion. The young Poppius felt so unhappy that he resolved to take his own life. He seemed to think that that was the most effective way to outwit these gods of misfortune who persecuted him and made his life a torment.

One can understand an unhappy mortal committing suicide to escape the persecutions of men, but only a fool like Silvius Antonius would have recourse to such a device in order to escape from the gods. It makes one think of the famous story of the man who fled from a lion and sprang right into his wide-open jaws.

Young Poppius was too effeminate to choose a violent death. Nor did he like the idea of dying painfully by poison. After much consideration he determined on an easy death in the waters. But

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when he went down to the Tiber to drown himself, he could not make up his mind to commit his body to the turbid, thickly flowing waters of the river. For a good while he stood irresolute and stared into the stream. Then he was seized by the magic influence which broods over rivers. He felt the great solemn impulse which animates these restless wanderers of nature, and determined to see the ocean.

“I will die in a clear blue sea, which is penetrated to its bottom by sunlight,” said Silviu Antoniu. “My body shall rest on a red bed of coral. The foaming ripples which I shall send up when I sink down into the depth shall be snow-white and fresh; they shall not resemble the grime-blackened bubbles which stand and tremble here at the river’s edge.”

He hastened home at once, ordered his carriage, and drove out to Ostia.

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He knew that one of his father's ships was lying in the harbour ready to sail. The young Poppius urged his horses to their utmost speed, and succeeded in getting on board just as the anchor was lifted. It is easy to understand that he did not consider he needed any baggage or outfit. It did not even occur to him to ask the captain in which direction he was sailing. He was at any rate going to sea, and that was enough for him.

It was not long before the young would-be suicide obtained his wish. The trireme had left the mouth of the Tiber, and the Mediterranean lay spread out before Silvius Antonius—blue, glistening with foam, and glittering in the sunlight. The aspect of the sea inclined Silvius Antonius to believe the assertion of the poets that the heaving water was only a thin veil which concealed a world of beauty, and that he who boldly

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plunges through the surface immediately reaches the pearl-castle of the sea-god. The young man congratulated himself at having chosen this kind of death. Properly speaking, it could not be called death at all; it was impossible to believe that this beautiful water could kill. It was only a passage into a world whose enjoyments would not prove deceptive, and leave only weariness and disgust behind them.

It was only with difficulty that he could control his eagerness, but the deck round him was crowded with sailors. Even Silvius Antonius could understand that if he sprang into the sea now, the consequence would merely be that one of his father's brisk seamen would jump in after him and bring him up.

Meanwhile after the sails had been hoisted and the rowers were in full swing, the captain approached him with great politeness. "You are coming

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then with me to Germany, my Silvius," he said. "You do me a great honour."

Young Poppius remembered all at once that this man had never returned from a journey without bringing for him, as a present, some curiosity from the barbarous regions which he visited. He had given him pieces of wood with which the savages produced fire, great ox-horns which they used as drinking-vessels, and a large necklace of bear's teeth which had been a great chief's sign of distinction.

This excellent man beamed with satisfaction at having his master's son on board his ship. He regarded it as a new proof of the wisdom of the elder Poppius that he sent his son to distant lands and no longer let him go about with the lazy young Romans and become effeminate. Young Poppius did not dispel his error. He feared that the captain would turn

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the ship homeward again if he betrayed his real purpose.

"Certainly, Galenas," he answered; "I would be only too glad to accompany you on this journey, but I fear that I must ask you to set me on shore at Baiae. I have made up my mind too late. You see me here without baggage or money."

But Galenas assured him that he need not give up the journey for such an easily remedied want. Was he not on his father's well-furnished ship? He need not lack warm, fur-lined garments if the weather became severe, or light raiment of Syrian fabrics, such as seamen wear when they cruise in calm weather through a group of friendly islands.

Three months after the departure from Ostia the trireme of Galenas was being rowed through a rocky archi-

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pelago. Neither the captain nor any of the crew knew exactly where they were, but they were glad to be sheltered for a while from the storms which raged over the open sea.

One could really have believed that Silvius Antonius was right in asserting that some divinity persecuted him. No one on board had ever experienced such a journey. The unfortunate seamen remarked to each other that they had not had two days' good weather since they had left Ostia. One storm had followed another. They had been subjected to incredible sufferings. Hunger and thirst had tormented them, while both day and night, exhausted and nearly ill with want of sleep, they had been obliged to manage the sails and ply the oars.

The discontent of the seamen was increased by their inability to carry on any traffic. In such weather how could

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they approach any shore in order to spread out their wares on the strand and carry on bargains? On the contrary, whenever a coast-line appeared through the obstinate mists, heavy with rain, which surrounded them, they had to put out to the open sea from fear of the wave-battered cliffs. One night when they had grounded on an island, they were obliged to throw half their cargo overboard. They hardly dared to think about the other half, for it was to be feared that its value was also completely destroyed after so many huge waves had broken over the ship.

Certainly Silvius Antonius had not proved to be a man who brings luck to the ship he sails in, for he still lived and had not drowned himself. It would have been impossible to explain why he prolonged an existence which could not be more comfortable now than when he first determined to shorten it. Perhaps

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he had hoped that the sea would take possession of him without his having anything to do in the matter. Perhaps he no longer loved the wrathful raging ocean, and had resolved to die in the green-gleaming perfumed water in his marble baths.

But if Galenas and his men had known with what intention young Poppius had come on board, they would assuredly have bitterly complained at his non-fulfilment of it, for they were all convinced that it was his presence which was responsible for this misfortune. During many a dark night Galenas had feared that the seamen would rush on the shipowner's son and fling him into the water. More than one of them declared that in the terrible stormy nights he had seen dark hands rising out of the water and reaching after the ship. And they did not think it was necessary to cast any lots

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among the crew to find out the man whom these hands wished to draw down into the deep. Both captain and crew did Silvius Antonius the singular honour of believing that it was on his account that all these storms raged through the air and lashed the sea into fury.

If Silvius Antonius at this time had behaved like a man, if he had taken his part in the common toil and anxiety, perhaps some of his companions would have felt pity for him as for one who had drawn on himself the wrath of the gods. But the young man had not understood how to earn their sympathy. He had thought of nothing except how to protect himself from the wind and cold, for which purpose he hunted out furs and coverings from the cargo.

But for the present all grumbling at his presence was stilled. As soon as the storm had succeeded in driving the trireme among the above-mentioned

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islands it had ceased to rage. It behaved like a sheep-dog who stops barking and is quiet as soon as it sees the flock on the right way to the fold. The heavy clouds rolled away from the sky and the sun shone. For the first time during the voyage the crew beheld nature wearing its summer smile.

The sunshine and warmth had an almost intoxicating effect on these storm-beaten men. Instead of longing for rest and sleep, they felt as cheerful as children who rejoice in the light of morning. Hope sprang within them anew. They guessed that they would find a mainland behind this multitude of rocky islands. They expected to find inhabitants—and who could tell? On this remote shore which perhaps had never been visited before by a Roman ship, they would be able to dispose of their wares to advantage, and at last be fortunate enough to fill the ship's hold

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with large skins of bear and elk, of white wax and gold-gleaming amber.

While the trireme continued to thread its way among the islands which became constantly higher and richer in luxurious vegetation and woods, the crew hastened to adorn it so that it should attract the attention of the natives. The ship, even without decoration the most beautiful of the works of men, soon glided over the water, vying in splendour with the birds of most brilliant plumage. Though only lately battered and beaten by the storm it now showed a mast with a gilded top, and splendid sails edged with purple. At the prow shone an image of Neptune, and on the stern stood a tent of varicoloured silk. And it may be taken for granted that the crew did not forget to cover the ship's sides with carpets whose fringes trailed in the water, and to encircle the heavy oars with gold bands.

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They also took off the brine-drenched clothes which they had worn during the voyage, and which the storms and sea-water had done their best to turn into rags. They put on white garments, girded themselves with purple waistbands, and adorned their hair with gleaming rings.

Even Silvius Antonius roused himself from his sloth. He seemed to be glad to have something to occupy himself with which came within his comprehension; he had himself shaved and his hair clipped and his whole body rubbed with perfumed essences. Then he put on a robe reaching to the ground, fastened a mantle on his shoulders, fixed a broad gold circlet in his hair, and from the great jewel-box which Galenas opened for him he took out rings and bracelets, a necklace and a golden girdle. When he was completely dressed he rolled up the purple curtains of the silken tent,

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and reclined on a low couch in the doorway of it, in order to be seen by the natives on the shore.

During these preparations the ship had been gliding through an ever-narrowing sound, till at last the crew observed that they had reached the estuary of a river, and were sailing in fresh water. On both sides of them appeared the mainland.

The trireme glided slowly on the gleaming waters. The weather was beautiful, and the whole of nature smiled serenely. The vast solitude was pleasantly relieved by the presence of the gorgeous trading vessel.

On both shores of the river grew high and dense primeval forests. Down to the water's edge dark pine trees stood, growing closely together. In its ceaseless course the river had succeeded in carrying away the earth from between their roots, and it was these, looking

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like bare limbs of giants, which produced an impression of awe upon the seamen more than the ancient trees themselves. "Never," they thought, "will men succeed here in cultivating corn, or in clearing ground for a city or an estate. For miles round this network of roots, hard as steel, has been interwoven in the ground. That alone is enough to make the might of the forest invincible and everlasting."

Along the river-side the trees stood so dense, and their branches were so closely woven together, that they formed a firm, impenetrable wall. This wall of pricking pine-needles was so strong and high that no fortified town could have wished for a better defence. None the less, here and there were openings in the wall of pines. These were the ends of the paths by which animals used to come down to the river to drink. Through these

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openings the voyagers could catch glimpses of the interior of the forest. Never had they seen anything like it. In the sunless twilight grew trees whose trunks were larger than the towers at the gates of Rome. It was a confused multitude of trees who struggled with each other for light and air. They pressed together and fought, some being checked in their growth and weighed down by others, some struck roots into the branches of others, and fought for mastery with their rivals as though they had been men.

But if animals or men (so thought the crew) lived in this world of trees, they must possess other means of making their way than the Romans knew of, for, from the ground to the tops of the trees, the whole wood was a network of stiff, unyielding branches. From these branches hung down long lappets of grey moss which metamorphosed the

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trees into wizard-like creatures with hair and beard. But the ground between them was covered with mouldering trunks, and a traveller's foot would have sunk in the rotten wood as though in melting snow.

Out of the forest was wafted a scent which seemed to all those on the ship to have something stupefying about it. It was the strong scent of resin and wild honey blended with the mouldy smell of rotting tree-trunks, and of huge red and yellow mushrooms.

Doubtless there was in all this something alarming, but it was also uplifting to encounter Nature in all her virgin might, before men had interfered with it. It was not long before one of the seamen began to hum a hymn to the god of the forest, and involuntarily all the crew joined in with it. They no longer expected to find men in this sylvan world. Their hearts were filled

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with religious thoughts of the wood-god and his nymphs. They said to themselves that Pan, driven from the woods of Greece, had fled to the remotest north. They entered his kingdom with devout hymns.

At each pause in the singing they heard a quiet music in the wood. It was from the pine-needles in the tree-tops, which quivered and trembled in the noonday heat. The seamen paused more frequently in their singing, in order to hear if they could catch the notes of the flute of Pan. Ever slower grew the strokes of the oars. The seamen looked down into the water flowing gold-green and violet-black beneath the pines, and into the beds of long reeds, whose leaves quivered and rustled under the force of the current. They were filled with such a feeling of nervous expectation that they started at the sight of a wandering dragon-fly, or

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of the white water-lilies which shone in the liquid gloom between the reed-stalks. And again they sang, "O Pan, thou god of the wood." They had given up all thoughts of trading. They felt that they stood at the entrance of the dwelling-place of the gods. All earthly cares had vanished from them. Then all at once they saw standing at the end of one of these forest paths an elk-deer, a kingly animal with a broad forehead and what seemed a wood of branching antlers.

On the trireme there fell a breathless silence. The oars held against the current, prevented it proceeding. Silvius Antonius rose from his purple couch. All eyes were turned towards the animal, and they thought they caught a glimpse of something it carried on its back, but the darkness of the forest and the overhanging branches made it impossible to see distinctly. The power-

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ful elk stood opposite the trireme, and sniffed the air as though in alarm. At last he seemed to perceive that there was nothing hostile about it, and took first one step into the water, and then another. Between his wide antlers there gleamed, ever more distinctly, something clear and rosy. Did the elk perhaps carry on his back a whole harvest of wild roses?

The crew made some gentle strokes with their oars. The trireme came nearer the animal, gliding as though of its own accord ever nearer the edge of the reeds.

The elk stepped quietly out into the water, planting its feet carefully in order not to be caught by the roots at the bottom of the river. Now they saw distinctly above its horns the face of a girl surrounded by fair hair. The elk carried on its back one of those nymphs whom they expected to see as one of the

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denizens who would, of course, be found inhabiting this primeval world.

The crew of the trireme were seized with a kind of sacred ecstasy. One of them, whose home was in Sicily, remembered a song which he had sung in his youth when he played on the flowery plains near Syracuse: "Nymph named Arethusa, nymph among flowers born, thou who, white as a moonbeam, wanderest the forest through." When the storm-hardened men caught the words they tried to soften the tempestuous tones of their voices in order to sing also, "Nymph named Arethusa, nymph among flowers born!" The ship was propelled nearer and nearer to the edge of the reeds. They took no notice of the fact that it had twice already scraped the bottom.

But the young wood-creature sat and played hide-and-seek behind the elk's antlers. One moment she hid herself,

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at another she peeped out; she did not check the animal, but drove it farther into the water. When its long legs had stridden a fathom or two farther she caressed it in order to make it stand still. She then bent down and plucked up some water-lilies. The men in the ship looked shamefacedly at each other. The nymph had come down simply and solely to pluck the white lilies which swung on the waters. She had not come on account of the Roman seamen. Then Silvius Antonius drew a ring from his finger, uttered a cry which made her look up, and threw the ring to her.

She stretched out her hand and caught it. Her eyes began to brighten. She stretched out her hand again. Silvius threw another ring. All at once she flung the water-lilies back into the river and drove the elk farther into the water. From time to time she stopped it, then came another ring from Silvius

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Antonius and enticed her farther. Suddenly all her hesitation vanished. The colour rose in her cheeks. She came nearer the ship without needing to be enticed. The elk was up to its shoulders in the water, and quite close under the deck. Then the crew bent over the gunwale in order to help the beautiful nymph in case she wished to come on deck.

But she had only eyes for Silvius Antonius, who stood there, adorned with rings and bedecked with pearls, as magnificent as a sunrise. And when the young Roman saw that her eyes were turned to him, he leant farther forward than anyone else. They called to him to take care lest he should lose his foothold and fall into the water, but the warning was in vain. It is uncertain whether the nymph drew Silvius Antonius towards her by a sudden pull, or how it happened, but he was

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overboard before anyone thought of laying hold of him.

However, there was no danger of Silvius Antonius being drowned. The nymph reached out her rosy arms and caught him. He had scarcely touched the surface of the water. At the same moment her steed turned round, rushed through the water, and disappeared in the forest. They heard the loud peal of the wild huntress's laughter as she carried off Silvius Antonius.

Galenas and his men stood for a moment dumb with alarm. As though it were a catastrophe which had happened at sea, some of them threw off their clothes in order to swim to the land. Galenas restrained them.

"Doubtless this is the will of the gods," he said. "For this purpose they have driven Silvius Antonius Poppius through a thousand storms to this unknown land. Let us be glad that

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we were an instrument for their design. But let us not try to hinder him."

The crew obediently resumed their oars and rowed down the river, and in unison with the oars' rhythmical stroke they hummed softly the song of the flight of Arethusa.

.

After listening to this narrative the traveller will understand the significance of the old engraving on the slab of rock shown him at Kungahälla. He will be able to make out both the elk with the many branched antlers, and the trireme with the long oars. They will not expect him to see Silvius Antonius Poppius and the beautiful forest queen, for in order to do that he would need the eyes of the old reciters of the sages. He will also understand that the engraving on the stone comes down from the young Roman himself, and is actually connected with the old story. Silvius

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Antonius has taught it word for word to his descendants. He knew that it would please them to learn that they were the offspring of the world-famous Romans.

But of course the stranger is not obliged to believe that one of Pan's nymphs wandered by this river-shore. He can well understand that a wild race of men dwelt in the primeval forest, and that the rider on the great elk was the daughter of the king who ruled over them, and that the girl when she carried off Silvius Antonius only wished to seize his ornaments, thinking nothing at all of him personally, and hardly knowing whether he were a human being like herself!

The traveller can also well understand that the name of Silvius Antonius would not be still remembered on these if he had continued to be the same fool as before. He can hear how the young

The Forest Queen

Roman was reformed by misfortune and by distress, and how, after being the despised slave of the wild men, he became their king. It was he who attacked the primeval forest with fire and steel. He erected the first well-built house. He constructed ships, sowed corn, and laid the foundations of the greatness of Kungahälla.

When the traveller has heard this he will view the surroundings with more cheerful looks than before, for although the city has changed into fields and meadows, and there is no navigation on the river, it is, after all, this soil which has let him see pictures from the past, and breathe the atmosphere of dream-land.

SIGRID STORRADA

ONE beautiful springtide the Swedish Queen, Sigrid Storrada, had appointed a meeting in Kungahälla with the Norwegian King, Olaf Tryggvason, in order to draw up the terms of their marriage settlement.

It was certainly strange that King Olaf wished to marry Queen Sigrid, for although she was rich, beautiful, and magnanimous, she was a thorough heathen. King Olaf, on the other hand, was a Christian, whose whole mind was bent on building churches and compelling people to be baptised. But perhaps he thought that the Lord God would convert her.

But it was still more strange that

Sigrid Storråda

when Storråda had informed King Olaf that she would sail to Kungahälla as soon as the sea was free from ice, the spring commenced at once. All the frost and snow disappeared just when it was generally the depth of winter. And when Storråda spoke about getting her ships ready, the ice disappeared from the fiords, the meadows began to grow green, and though it was long before Lady Day the cattle could be turned out to pasturage.

When the Queen sailed out between the islands of East Gothland into the Baltic, cuckoos were calling from the cliffs, although it was still so early in the season that one could scarcely hope to hear the song of the lark.

Near whatever shore Storråda sailed there was great joy. All the giants who had been obliged to fly from Norway under King Olaf's rule, because they

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could not endure the sound of church-bells, came out on the tops of the cliffs when they saw Storråda sailing by. They tore up young trees by the roots and waved them at the Queen, and when they entered their stone cottages where their wives sat, oppressed with longing and grief, they laughed and said, "Now, wife, you need not be troubled any more. Storråda is journeying to King Olaf, and we shall soon return to Norway."

When the Queen sailed by Kullaberg, the Kullaman came out of his cavern. He caused the black mountain to open so that she saw how it was traversed by gold and silver veins within, and was delighted at the sight of his wealth.

When Storråda passed by the Halland River, the Neckan swam down his rapids and waterfalls to the mouth of the river, and played on his harp so that the ships danced on the waves.

Sigrid Storråda

As she passed by the Nidinger Islands, the sea-nymphs lay there and blew in their shells so that the water spouted up in lofty columns of foam.

When the wind was contrary, ugly trolls rose from the deep and helped Storråda's ship over the waves. Some pushed from behind at the stern; others took ropes of seaweed in their mouths and yoked themselves like horses to the ship.

The wildest Vikings, whom Olaf would not suffer to remain in the country because of their wickedness, came rowing up to the Queen's ship with their sails lowered and their grappling-irons raised in order to attack it. But when they recognised the Queen they allowed her to pass on uninjured, and called after her, "We drink good wishes to your wedding, Storråda!"

All the heathen who dwelt along the coast piled wood on their stone altars,

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and sacrificed sheep and goats to the ancient gods, that they should help Storråda on her journey to the Norwegian King.

As the Queen sailed up the Nordre River a mermaid came swimming to the ship, stretched her white arm up from the sea, and handed her a large lustrous pearl. "Wear it, Storråda," she said, "that the King may be bewitched by your beauty, and never be able to forget you."

When the Queen had gone a little way up the river she heard a great roaring and noise, so that she thought she was approaching a waterfall. The farther she went the more the noise increased, till at last she believed she was approaching some great battle.

But as the ship was rowed past the Gull Island, and turned into a Broad creek, she saw the great city of Kungahälla standing on the river-bank,

It was so large that as far as she could see up the river she only saw houses and houses. They were all of considerable size, and well built with many outhouses; narrow lanes ran between the grey wooden walls down to the river, broad courtyards stretched before the houses, and well-beaten paths led from each down to its boat-house and quay.

Storråda ordered her rowers to lift their oars slowly. She stood high on the poop of the ship and looked towards the shore. "Never have I seen anything like it," she said.

Now she understood that all the uproar which she heard simply rose from all the work which went on in Kungahälla in the spring, when the ships were being prepared for their long voyages. She heard smiths plying their heavy sledge-hammers, the clattering of rolling-pins in the bake-houses,

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planks of timber were being noisily piled on heavy barges, youths were stripping the bark from trees which were to serve as masts, and were planing broad oar-blades.

She saw many green enclosures where young girls sat twisting ropes for the seafarers, and old men, needle in hand, sewed patches on to sails of frieze-cloth.

She saw boat-builders tarring new boats. Nails were being driven into strong planks of oak. Hulls of ships were being pushed out of boat-houses in order to be made water-tight. Old vessels were being ornamented with freshly painted figures of dragons. Goods were being piled up, people were bidding each other hasty farewells, heavily packed ships' chests were being hauled on board.

Ships which were already equipped for their voyage pushed off from shore.

Sigrîð Storrâda

Storrâda saw that those which rowed up the river carried heavy cargoes of herrings and salt, while those which steered westward towards the open sea were loaded up to their masts with valuable oak, timber, hides, and skins.

When the Queen saw all this she laughed for joy. She said that she would gladly become the spouse of King Olaf in order to reign over such a city. She had her ship rowed to the quay of the King's palace. There King Olaf stood to receive her, and as she came forward to meet him she seemed to him the fairest woman he had ever beheld.

They went together to the King's palace, and between both was great accord and friendship. When the time came to sit down to table, Storrâda laughed and jested with the King while the Bishop was pronouncing grace, and the King laughed and talked also

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when he saw that it pleased Storråda. When the meal was finished and all the guests folded their hands to listen to the Bishop's prayer, Storråda began to tell the King about her wealth, and continued to do so as long as the prayer lasted. And the King listened to Storråda but not to the Bishop.

The King set Storråda in the chief place, while he himself sat at her feet. And Storråda related to him how she had caused two inferior kings who had wooed her to be burnt to death in their own houses. The King was glad and thought, "So it should happen to all inferior kings who ventured to woo such a woman as Storråda."

When the Vesper-bell rang the King rose to go, as was his custom, to the Church of the Virgin and pray there, but Storråda summoned her hand, and he sang the song of Brunhild who had Sigurd Fafnibane put to death. King

Sigrid Storråda

Olaf did not go to church, but sat there instead watching Storråda's majestic eyes, and saw how strongly marked her black eyebrows were. Then he understood that Storråda was Brunhild, and that she would kill him if he betrayed her. He saw also that she would be a woman to burn herself with him on the same funeral pyre. All the time that the priests were reading Mass and praying in the Church of the Virgin at Kungahälla, King Olaf sat and thought how he would like to ride to Walhalla with Storråda before him on the horse.

At night the ferryman at Alfbacken, who took passengers in his boat over the Göta River, was busier than ever he had been before. Time after time he was called to the opposite bank, but when he came thither there was no one to be seen, yet he heard footsteps about him, and the boat became so

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full that it nearly sank. He spent the whole night pawing to and fro, and could not understand the meaning of it. But in the morning the sand on the river-bank was covered with small footprints, and in these footprints the ferryman espied tiny withered leaves which, when he observed them more closely, proved to be pure gold. Then he understood that all the brownies and gnomes who had fled from Norway when Christianity was introduced were now returning.

But the giant who lived in the Fontin Mountain, due east of Kungahälla, took up great masses of stone and hurled them one after the other at the tower of the Church of the Virgin all night long. If the giant had not been so strong that all his stones fled over the river and fell far away in Hisingen, great damage might have been done.

Sigrid Storråda

King Olaf had been accustomed to go to Mass every morning, but on the day that Storråda was in Kungahälla he seemed to have no time for it. As soon as he had risen he resolved to go down at once to the harbour, where she lived on her ship, in order to ask whether she would celebrate her nuptials with him that evening. The Bishop had caused the bells in the Church of the Virgin to be rung the whole morning, and when the King came out of the palace and crossed over the market-place the church doors were wide open and the sounds of melodious singing were borne to him. But the King went on as though he had heard nothing. Then the Bishop had the bell-ringing stopped, the singing ceased, and the lights went out. This happened so suddenly that the King stopped for a moment and looked back at the church. It seemed to him more insignificant

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seen her before. Doubtless she is a high-born lady who has fallen into straits."

In spite of the King's haste to reach Storråda, he could not turn his eyes away from the woman. He kept on wondering where he had seen such gentle eyes and such a beautifully formed face.

All this while the woman continued to stand in the church door, as though she could not tear herself away. Then the King went up to her and asked: "Why are you so troubled?"

"I have been driven out of my home," she said, and pointed into the dark little church.

The King thought that she meant she had stayed in the church because she had no other dwelling. He questioned her further. "Who has driven you out?"

She looked at him with unspeakable

Sigrîd Storrâda

sorrow. "Do you not know?" she asked.

But then the King turned away from her. He had no time, he thought, to stand here and guess riddles. The woman seemed to hint that he had driven her out. He could not understand to what she was alluding.

The King went on hastily. He came down to the quay where Storrâda's ship lay at anchor. Down by the harbour he met the Queen's servants, who all wore garments edged with gold and silver helmets on their heads.

Storrâda was standing on a lofty part of the ship surveying Kungahälla, and rejoicing at the sight of its power and wealth. She stood and looked down on the city as though she regarded herself already as its queen. But when the King saw Storrâda he thought at once of the beautiful but poverty-stricken woman whom he had seen coming out of

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the church. "How is it," he thought, "that she seems to me more beautiful than Storråda?" When the latter smiled at him, he could not help remembering how the tears had shone in the other woman's eyes. Her face was so clearly impressed on his memory that he could compare Storråda's with it, feature by feature, and as he did so, all Storråda's beauty vanished. He saw that her eyes were cruel, and her mouth sensual. In every feature of her face he discovered a sin. He still perceived that she was beautiful, but he had no more pleasure in looking at her. He began to feel a horror at her as at some glittering snake.

When the Queen saw the King coming, her lips wreathed themselves in a triumphant smile. "I did not expect you so soon, King Olaf. I thought you would be at Mass."

The King suddenly felt a desire to

irritate Storråda, and to do all that she did not like. "The Mass has not yet begun," he said. "I come to ask you to accompany me to the House of God."

As the King said this he perceived a steely look come into Storråda's eyes, but she continued to smile. "Better come here on the ship," she said. "I will show you the gifts which I have brought for you."

She took up a golden sword as if to entice him, but the King still seemed to see the other woman near her, and Storråda appeared to him to be mounting guard over her treasures like a repulsive dragon. "Tell me first," said the King, "whether you will go with me to church?"

"What should I do in your church?" she asked, with a scornful look. Then she saw that the King's eyebrows were contracted in a frown, and understood

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that he was not in the same mood as on the previous day. She immediately altered her demeanour and became gentle and conciliatory. "Go to church," she said, "as much as you like, even if I do not go. That should not cause any unfriendliness between us."

The Queen descended from the ship and came towards the King. She held in her hand a sword and a fur-trimmed mantle which she wished to give him as presents.

At that moment the King happened to look towards the harbour. From a distance he saw the other woman approaching. She walked stooping with tired steps, still carrying the child on her arm.

"What are you looking at so eagerly, King Olaf?" asked Storråda.

Then the other woman turned, and as she looked at him two golden circles

of light seemed to be kindled above her head and that of the child, more brilliant than all the ornaments of kings and queens; but immediately afterwards she went towards the town and he saw her no more.

“What are you looking at so eagerly, King Olaf?” asked Storråda again.

But when King Olaf turned to the Queen he saw her old and ugly, surrounded by all the deceitfulness and sin of the world, and shocked to think that he could have fallen into her net. He had taken off his glove in order to give her his hand, but now he took the glove and struck her in the face with it. “What have I to do with you, you old heathen witch?” he said.

Storråda started back three paces, but she quickly collected herself and answered, “That blow will prove your bane, King Olaf Trytretched out on

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she was as pale as Hela,¹ when she turned from him and ascended the ship.

The next night King Olaf dreamed a strange dream. What he saw before him was not the earth, but the bottom of the sea. It was a greenish-grey ground above which the waters stood many fathoms deep. He saw fishes swimming after their prey, ships gliding above on the surface of the water like dark clouds, and beheld the disk of the sun faintly glimmering like a pale moon.

Then came the woman whom he had seen standing in the church door, walking on the bottom of the sea. She was in the same stooping attitude, and had the same worn clothes in which he first met her, and her face was still full of anxiety.

But as she walked along the bottom of the sea the water parted before her. as she looked at cf. Scandinavian Mythology.

He saw how, as though constrained by unspeakable awe, it rose up into the form of a roof, and was consolidated into columns so that she seemed to be walking through a magnificent temple. Suddenly the King saw that the water, which had formed an arch above the woman, began to change colour: the pillars and roof became at first bright red, but quickly assumed an even deeper tint; the whole sea around was also red, as though it had been turned into blood.

On the bottom of the sea, over which the woman walked, the King beheld broken swords and arrows, shattered bows and lances. At first there were not many of them, but the farther she walked amid the red water the thicker they lay, heaped together. The King saw with trembling how the woman turned to one side to avoid stepping on a dead man who lay stretched out on

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a green bed of seaweed. The man was dressed in armour, he had a sword in his hand, and a deep wound in his head. It seemed to the King that the woman shut her eyes in order to see nothing. She was making for a definite goal without wavering or fear, but he, the dreamer, could not turn his eyes away.

He saw the whole bottom of the sea covered with wreckage, heavy anchors, thick ropes coiled like snakes, ships with their sides split, while the gilded dragons' heads, which had adorned their sterns, stared at him with red, threatening eyes.

"I should like to know who has fought a sea battle here and left all these relics to slowly perish," thought the dreamer. Everywhere he saw dead men; they were hanging over the ships' bulwarks, or lay sunk down in the luxuriant seaweed, but he had not

much time to contemplate them, for he felt compelled to look at the woman who continued to wander on.

At last the King saw her pause before a dead man. He wore a red tunic, a shining helmet was on his head, his shield was fastened on his arm, and a naked sword was in his hand. The woman bent over him and whispered as though she wished to waken a sleeper. "King Olaf," she whispered, "King Olaf."

Then the dreamer saw that the man lying at the bottom of the sea was himself. He recognised distinctly that he was the dead man.

"King Olaf," whispered the woman again, "I am she whom you saw before the church in Kungahälla. Do you not know me?"

The dead man continued to lie motionless. She knelt down beside him and whispered in his ear, "Now Storråda

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has sent her fleet against you and taken vengeance on you. Do you regret it, King Olaf? "

Again she questioned him. " Now you suffer the bitterness of death because you chose me and not Storråda. Do you regret it? Do you regret it? "

Then at last the dead man opened his eyes and the woman helped him to rise. He supported himself on her shoulder and they walked slowly away. Again King Olaf watched her wandering through day and night, over sea and land. At length they seemed to him to have gone past the clouds and higher than the stars. They wandered in a pleasure-garden, where the ground shone like white light and the flowers were as clear as dew-drops.

The King saw that when the woman entered the garden she raised her head and her step became lighter. As they went farther in her garments began to

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shine. He saw how of themselves they became bordered with gold and gleaming with colours. He also saw that a circle of rays shone round her head and illumined her face.

But the man who had fallen in battle, who leaned on her shoulder, raised his head and asked: "Who are you?"

"Do you not know, King Olaf?" she answered, and an air of indescribable majesty enveloped her.

But the dreaming King was filled with joy that he had chosen to serve the fair Queen of Heaven. It was a joy such as he had never before experienced, and it was so keen that it awoke him.

When he awoke he felt his cheeks wet with tears, and he lay there with hands folded in prayer.

ASTRID

I

Among the low buildings belonging to the royal castle at Upsala stood the Maidens' Tower. It was raised on pillars like a dovecote; one ascended it by steps as steep as a ladder, and entered it by a door as low as a hatch. The walls within were covered with runes intended to signify love and longing; close to the narrow loopholes were visible small round hollows in the woodwork; it was there that the maidservants used to stand with heads propped on their elbows looking down on the courtyard below.

For some days the royal palace had

sheltered, as guest, the old Hjalte, the "skald" or poet. Every day he came up to the Maidens' Tower to the Princess Ingegerd, and talked with her about the King of Norway, Olaf Haraldson. Each time that Hjalte came, Ingegerd's maid, Astrid, sat there and listened to his talk with as much pleasure as the Princess. While Hjalte spoke, both maidens listened so eagerly that they let their work fall on their laps, and their hands were still. Anyone who saw them would not have thought that any women's work was going on in the Maidens' Tower. He would not have imagined that they were taking up Hjalte's words like silken threads, and that each for herself was weaving therefrom her picture of King Olaf like a piece of brilliant tapestry.

But at any rate it was so, and the picture woven by the Princess was so beautiful that each time she saw it

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before her she could have knelt down and worshipped it, for she saw the King sitting lofty and crowned on his throne; she saw a mantle embroidered with red and gold hang from his shoulders down to his feet; she saw no sword in his hand, but sacred writings; and his throne supported by a crouching kobold. White as wax she saw his face gleaming amid long smooth locks, and in his eyes was the light of devotion and peace. Alas! she was almost frightened when she beheld the superhuman power which beamed from his pale countenance. She understood that King Olaf was not only a king but a saint, and like to an angel.

But the picture of the King which Astrid created for herself was quite different. The blonde-haired servant-girl who had known both hunger and cold, and undergone much trouble, but who none the less was the one who

Astrid

filled the Maidens' Tower with sport and jest, conceived of the King in quite a different fashion. She could not help it, but every time she heard him spoken of she had to think of the woodcutter's son, who came in the evenings out of the wood with his axe on his shoulder. "I see you, I see you quite well," said Astrid to the picture, just as though it had been really someone. "You are not tall, but broad-shouldered and nimble and supple. After traversing the darkness of the forest the livelong day, you take the last piece of path with a bound and laugh, and leap high when you come out on the road. Then your teeth shine, and your hair flies in the wind, and that I like. I see you; your face is red-cheeked, and you have a bridge of freckles across your nose, and you have blue eyes, which grow dark and gloomy when you are deep in the forest, but

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when you get so far that you see the valley and your home, then they grow cheerful and mild. As soon as you see your own cottage at the bottom of the valley, you wave your cap and greet it, and then I see your forehead. Is it not a forehead such as a king should have? Should not that broad brow be able to wear a crown and helmet? "

But however different these two images were, one thing is certain, that deeply as the Princess loved the saint's picture which she conjured up, the young girl loved with equal devotion the bold young fellow whom she saw approaching her from the depth of the wood.

And if Hjalte the skald had been able to see both pictures, it is certain that he would have praised them both. He would have said that each of them resembled the King. For King Olaf's

good fortune, he would have said, had willed that he should be both a fresh and cheerful youth, and at the same time a saintly hero of God.

For old Hjalte loved King Olaf, and although he had gone from court to court and seen many men, he had never been able to find his like. "Where shall I find a man to make me forget Olaf Haraldson?" he was wont to say. "Where shall I meet a more excellent man?"

Hjalte the skald was a crabbed old man of uncouth aspect. Old though he was, he had black hair, his complexion was dark, and his glance sharp. His singing also had always been in keeping with his aspect. His words and songs were all of battle and war. The heart of old Hjalte had hitherto been like the wilderness before the hut of the backwoodsman. It had been like a great heap of stones out of which

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nothing will grow but lean bracken and stiff rock-grass. But in his wanderings Hjalte had come to the court of Upsala and seen Princess Ingegerd. He had perceived that she was nobler than any other woman whom he had met. Truly the Princess excelled other women in beauty, as King Olaf surpassed other men in manly grace.

Then suddenly the idea occurred to Hjalte that he would try to kindle love between the Swedish Princess and the Norwegian King. He asked himself why she who stood chief among women should not love King Olaf who was pre-eminent among men. After this thought had taken root in Hjalte's mind he gave up composing his gloomy war-songs. He ceased to win praise and honour from the rugged warriors at the court at Upsala, and spent long hours with the women in the Maidens' Tower. And one would not have believed that it

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was Hjalte who spoke, or that he could have used such beautiful and gentle expressions as he did in speaking of King Olaf.

No one would have recognised Hjalte. Since the idea of this marriage had taken possession of him, he was completely changed. The beautiful thought grew out of Hjalte's soul like a magnificent rose with soft scented petals out of a piece of uncultivated ground.

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One day Hjalte was sitting again with the Princess in the Maidens' Tower. All the maidens had gone out with the exception of Astrid.

Hjalte now considered that he had talked long enough about Olaf Haraldson. He had said about him the best that he could, but had it produced any real result? What did the Princess think of the King? Hjalte

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began to lay traps for the Princess, in order to discover what was her opinion of King Olaf. "I shall be able to tell by a glance or a blush," he said to himself.

But the Princess was of lofty birth; she knew how to conceal her thoughts. She neither blushed nor smiled. No lovelight shone in her eyes. She gave Hjalte no hint of what she thought.

While the skald looked in her noble face, he began to feel ashamed of himself. "She is too good that one should steal upon her by surprise," he thought. "One must meet her in open battle." So he spoke out plainly: "King's daughter, if Olaf Haraldson desired you in marriage from your father, what would you say?"

The young Princess's face lighted up, as the faces of men do when they ascend a mountain and behold the sea. She answered without beating about the

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bush: "If he is such a King and such a Christian as you have described, Hjalte, it would be a great happiness for me."

But scarcely had she said this than the light in her eyes was extinguished. It seemed as though a pillar of mist had risen between her and the fair ideal in the distance. "Alas, Hjalte," she said, "you forget one thing: King Olaf is our enemy. It is war and not an offer of marriage that we have to expect from him."

"Let that not trouble you," said Hjalte. "If only *you* are willing, all will be well. I know King Olaf's wishes in this matter."

Hjalte the skald was so pleased that he laughed as he said this, but the Princess became more and more depressed. "No," she said, "this matter neither depends on me nor on King Olaf, but on my father, Olof

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Skötkonung, and you know that he hates Olaf Haraldson, and will allow no one to mention his name. Never will he let me follow an enemy of his kingdom. Never will he give his daughter to Olaf Haraldson."

As the Princess spoke she laid aside all her pride and began to lament to Hjalte. "What does it help me that I have learnt now to know Olaf Haraldson, that I dream of him every night, and long for him every day? Were it not better that I had never heard of him? Were it not better if you had never come and talked to me about him?"

As the Princess said this her eyes filled with tears, and when Hjalte saw them he raised his hand and spoke with passionate eagerness. "God wills it!", he exclaimed. "You belong together. Strife must exchange its red mantle for the white robe of peace in order that

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your happiness may make glad the land."

When Hjalte spoke the Princess first bowed her head at the mention of God's name, then she raised it with newly awakened hope.

As old Hjalte stepped out of the low door and passed along the narrow gallery which was not protected by any railing, Astrid came after him.

"Oh, Hjalte," she exclaimed, "why do you not ask me what I should answer Olaf Haraldson if he desired my hand?" It was the first time that Astrid spoke to Hjalte. But Hjalte merely cast a rapid glance at the golden-haired servant-girl, whose locks clustered round her temples and her neck, who wore broad bracelets and heavy earrings, who had her kirtle tied with silken strings, and her bodice so studded with pearls that it was as stiff as a

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breast-plate. Then he went on his way without answering.

"Why do you only question Princess Ingegerd?" continued Astrid. "Why don't you also ask me? Do you not know that I am the daughter of the King of Svea? Do you not know," she continued, as Hjalte still refrained from answering, "that though my mother was a serf, she became the King's bride in his youth? Do you not know that so long as she lived no one dared to remember her birth? Oh, Hjalte, do you not know that it was not till she died and the King married again that everyone remembered that she was not a free woman?"

"It was not till I had a stepmother that the King began to recollect that I was of low birth. But am I not a king's daughter, Hjalte, although my father regarded me as so small and contemptible that he let me sink down among

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the serfs? Am I not a king's daughter although my stepmother let me go in rags while my sister went in golden attire? Am I not a king's daughter although my stepmother sent me to mind ducks and geese, and though I was chastised with the whip reserved for serfs? And if I am a king's daughter, why not ask me if I will marry Olaf Haraldson? See, I have curly golden hair, which covers my head as light as down! See, I have beautiful eyes and blooming cheeks! Why should not King Olaf wish to have me? "

She followed Hjalte across the courtyard to the King's house, but Hjalte paid as little heed to her lament as an armed warrior to the stone cast by a boy. He listened no more to the gold-locked servant-maid than if she had been a chattering magpie on a tree-top.

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Hjalte was by no means satisfied with having won Ingegerd for his King. No. On the following day the old Icclander summoned up all his courage and spoke to Olof Skötkonung concerning Olaf Haraldson. But before he could with difficulty bring out what he had to say, the King interrupted the bard as soon as he began to speak of his enemy. Hjalte understood that the Princess was right. Never had he witnessed an exhibition of intenser hatred.

"But still this marriage must take place," he said to himself. "It is the will of God, the will of God."

And it certainly looked as though Hjalte was right. Only a few days later there came a messenger from King Olaf in Norway in order to negotiate peace with the Swedes. Hjalte sought out this messenger, and told him that peace could not be better established between the two countries than by a marriage

between Princess Ingegerd and Olaf Haraldson.

The envoy found it difficult to believe that old Hjalte had been able to turn a maiden's heart towards a man whom she had never seen, but the idea seemed to him, at any rate, a good one. He promised Hjalte that he would bring this proposal of marriage before Olof Skötkonung at the sitting of the great winter Parliament at Upsala.

Immediately afterwards Hjalte left Upsala. He went about from dwelling to dwelling on the wide plain, he penetrated deep into the forests, and came down to the seashore. Never did he meet a man without speaking of Olaf Haraldson and the Princess Ingegerd. "Have you ever heard of a more distinguished man, or a kinder woman?" he said. "Without doubt, it is God's will that they should walk through life together."

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He came to the old Vikings who spent their winters on the sea-coast, and who had formerly seized and carried off women from every shore. He talked to them about the beautiful Princess till they sprang up, and with hands on the hilts of their swords promised him that they would help her to her happiness. He went to the old masterful farmers, who had never listened to the complaints of their own daughters, but had arranged their marriages as prudence and the honour of the race demanded. With these Hjalte discoursed so wisely on the benefits of peace and the proposed marriage that they swore sooner to take the kingdom from the King than to allow such a union to be frustrated.

But to the young womenfolk Hjalte gave such splendid descriptions of Olaf Haraldson that they declared they would never look kindly on any youth

who would not stand by the Norwegian envoy in the Parliament and help to break down the great King's opposition. So Hjalte went about and talked till the time of the assembling of the winter Parliament, which brought the people by snowy roads to the Parliament Hill in Upsala. When the assembly met, the zeal of the people for the marriage was so great that it seemed as though the stars in heaven would be extinguished if it were not determined on.

And although the King twice returned a harsh "No!" to the proposals of peace and marriage, what did it avail him? Of what avail was it that he would not have King Olaf's name mentioned? "We will not have war with Norway!" shouted the people. "We wish that those two, whom all men honour, be companions for life!"

What could the old Olof Skötkonung do when the people broke out against

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him with threats, hard words, and clashing of weapons and shields? What could he do when he saw nothing before him but drawn swords and raging men? Must he not promise to give his daughter if he wished to preserve his crown and his life? Must he not swear to send the Princess to Kungahälla next summer in order to meet King Olaf there?

In this way all the people came to the succour of Ingegerd's love. But there was no one who tried to help Astrid to her happiness, no one who asked about her love. And yet Astrid was living, she lived like the child of a poor fisherman's widow in need and poverty, but grew up, in spite of all, glad and hopeful. She grew and lived, for in Astrid's soul there was, as there is on the sea, fresh air and light, abundant foam, and the surging waves.

II

IN the opulent Kungahälla, far on the frontier, stood a large ancient royal castle, surrounded by a high peat-covered wall. Outside the gates great monumental stones stood as sentinels, and within grew an oak which overshadowed the whole courtyard. Over the whole area enclosed by the walls stood long, low wooden buildings. They were so old that lichen grew on the roofs; the timbers of the walls which had grown thick in the primeval forests were hoary with age; the house-leeks grew as thick as scales on a fish; and the sedge-grass could hardly find room to thrust up one or two isolated stalks between them.

At the beginning of the summer Olaf Haraldson came to Kungahälla, and in the huge ancient royal castle collected all that was necessary to celebrate the

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marriage. For two whole weeks together long lines of peasants passed up the road to it, bringing on their small horses butter in tubs, cheese in sacks, hops and salt, turnips and meal. After these consignments had been made, for another fortnight the wedding-guests came thronging up the road, men and women of high stature on horseback, with long retinues of servants and serfs. After them followed crowds of jugglers, of minstrels, and reciters of sages. Merchants came from Venda¹ and Gardarike¹ to induce the King to buy bridal presents.

After these processions had traversed the city noisily for two weeks, people only waited for the last procession, that of the bride, but it still delayed to come. Every day the bride was expected to land at the royal quay, and afterwards, preceded by pipers and trumpeters, by

¹ Norse names for Germany and Russia.

Astrid

merry young squires and venerable priests, to pass up the road to the royal palace. Yet the bridal procession did not come.

While the bride tarried so long the eyes of all were turned upon King Olaf to see if he was disturbed or restless, but the King showed a calm countenance to all. "If God wills," said the King, "that this beautiful woman shall be mine, she will certainly come." And the King waited while the grass was being mown in the meadows, and the cornflowers bloomed in the rye-fields. He still waited while the flax was torn out of the ground, and the hoprunners on the high poles were turning yellow. And when the blackberries in the clefts of the rocks began to darken, and the dog-roses to redden on the bare branches of the thorn-bushes—he was still waiting.

.
During the whole summer Hjalte had

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gone about in Kungahälla, waiting for the marriage to take place. No one was more anxiously expecting the Princess than he. He certainly longed for her coming with more pain and uneasiness than King Olaf himself.

Neither did he feel comfortable among the warriors in the royal castle. But far down the river was a quay where the women of Kungahälla were accustomed to go in order to follow with their gaze the ships of their husbands and sons when they went on long voyages. Here they were accustomed to assemble throughout the summer in order to look down the river for ships coming up, and to weep over the departing voyagers. To this quay Hjalte now came every day. It suited him to keep company with those who mourned and were anxious. Certainly none of the women who had ever sat and waited on the "Quay of

Astrid

Tears " had ever looked down the river with more anxious looks than Hjalte the bard. No one fastened their eyes with keener expectation on every sail that glided past.

Sometimes also, Hjalte stole into the Church of the Virgin. He never prayed for anything for himself; he only came in to remind the saints of the marriage which was bound to take place, and which God Himself had favoured.

But most of all Hjalte loved to speak all alone with Olaf Haraldson. It was for him a joy to sit there and to repeat for him every word which the King's daughter had uttered. He described every feature of her face. " King! " he said to him, " pray God that she come to you. Every day I see you going out on expeditions against the old heathendom, which lurks hidden like an owl in the darkness of the forest and the clefts of the rocks. But your falcon,

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O King, will never conquer the owl. Only a dove can do that, only a dove."

The bard went on to ask the King whether he did not wish to overthrow all his opponents? Did he not wish to be sole ruler in the land? But he would never succeed in his aim until he possessed the crown which Hjalte had chosen for him—a crown which was so splendid and glorious that all men must obey its possessor.

Finally he asked the King whether he did not wish to win mastery over himself. But he would never succeed in overcoming the opposition of his own heart unless he could obtain a shield which Hjalte had seen in the Maidens' Tower of the royal castle at Upsala. That was a shield flashing with celestial purity. It would guard him against Satanic malice and the lusts of the flesh,

But the autumn came, and still the Princess delayed. One after another of the great men who had come as a wedding-guest to Kungahälla was obliged to leave. Last of all, old Hjalte departed also. With a heavy heart he sailed away, for he had to reach his home in distant Iceland before Christmas.

But he had scarcely reached the rocky skerries opposite the mouth of the Nordre River when he met a war-galley. Immediately he told his crew to stop rowing. He had recognised at the first glance that the vessel was the *Dragon*, which belonged to Princess Ingegerd. Without hesitation he bade his men row towards it. He left his place by the rudder, and took his stand with a joyful look in the forepart of the ship. "I am glad that I can behold the beautiful maid once more," he said. "I am glad that her fair face

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is the last I shall see before my voyage to Iceland."

There was hardly a wrinkle to be seen on Hjalte's countenance as he stepped on board the *Dragon*. He greeted the stalwart oarsmen in as friendly a fashion as though they had been his familiar comrades, and gave the maidservant who modestly conducted him to the women's tent in the stern of the ship a golden ring.

Hjalte's hand trembled as he lifted the curtain which hung before the tent door. It seemed to him the greatest moment of his life. "Never have I fought for a greater cause," he said. "For nothing have I striven so eagerly as to bring about this marriage." But when he entered the tent he started a step backward in blank dismay, and with a look of utter bewilderment.

He had seen a tall, beautiful woman in the tent. She had come forward to

meet him with outstretched hand. But this woman was not Ingegerd. Hjalte's eyes wandered round the narrow tent looking for the Princess. Certainly he saw that she who stood within was a king's daughter. Only a king's daughter could look at him so proudly, and greet him with such dignity. And she wore a princely diadem and royal garb. But why was she not Ingegerd?

Hjalte began to question the stranger excitedly. "Who are you?" he asked.

"Do you not know me, Hjalte? I am the King's daughter, with whom you spoke about Olaf Haraldson."

"I have spoken with a king's daughter about Olaf Haraldson, but her name was Ingegerd."

"My name also is Ingegerd."

"You may call yourself what you like, but you are not the Princess. What does all this mean? Is the King of Sweden deceiving King Olaf?"

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“No; not at all. He is sending him his daughter as he promised.”

A little more, and Hjalte would have drawn his sword to strike down the strange woman. His hand was already on the hilt, but he remembered that it did not become a warrior to take a woman's life; but he would not waste more words on this traitress. He turned himself to go.

The stranger called him back with a very gentle voice: “Whither are you going, Hjalte? Will you go to Kungahälla to warn Olaf Haraldson?”

“Yes, that is what I mean to do,” answered Hjalte, without looking at her.

“Why will you leave me, Hjalte? Why do you not stay with me? I am also going to Kungahälla.”

Then Hjalte turned round and looked at her. “Are you the woman to have compassion on an old man?” he said. “I tell you that I have set my whole

Astrid

heart on bringing this marriage about. Let me know now my whole mischance. Can Ingegerd not come at all? ”

Upon this the Princess ceased to jest with Hjalte. “Come in and sit down in the tent,” she said, “and I will tell you all you wish to know. I understand well that it is no use to hide the truth from you.”

Then she began her narrative: “The summer was already nearing its end,” she said. “The merry nestlings of the blackcock had already strong feathers in their split tails, and firmness in their round wings. They had already begun to flutter about the network of branches in the pine forest with rapid noisy wing-strokes.

“Then one morning came the King of Sweden riding over the plain. He had been fortunate in his sport—from the pommel of his saddle hung an old heathcock with a blue-black gleam on

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his plumage, a grim, red-eyebrowed fellow, together with four of his inexperienced offspring who still wore the speckled dress of infancy. The King was very proud of his success, as though aware that one did not often have better luck in a morning's sport with falcon and hawk.

"That very morning the Princess Ingegerd was standing with her maidens at the door of the castle awaiting the King. Among the maidens was one called Astrid, who, like Ingegerd, was a daughter of the Swedish King, although born of a serf mother and therefore herself regarded as a thrall. This young girl was standing there, and had pointed out to her sister how the swallows were gathering above the fields, and choosing for themselves a leader to conduct their long flight. She reminded her that the summer was now departing—the summer which should

Astrid

have witnessed Ingegerd's marriage, and urged her to ask the King why she had not been able to go to King Olaf, for Astrid had wished to make this journey with her sister. She thought that she would be glad all her days if she could but once see Olaf Haraldson.

"When the Swedish King saw the Princess, he rode towards her. 'See, Ingegerd,' he said, 'here are five heath-cock hanging at my saddle. I have brought them all down this morning. Can anyone, do you think, boast of better luck than that? Have you ever heard of a king having better sport?'

"But the Princess was put out of humour by his coming so proudly towards her and boasting of his own luck, while he was barring her way to happiness, and in order to put an end to the anxiety which had been consuming her for weeks, she answered: 'You, father, have distinguished your-

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self by bringing down five heathcock, but I know of a King who, in a single morning, took five kings prisoners. That was Olaf the hero, whom you chose as my husband.'

"Then the Swedish King sprang angrily out of his saddle, and with clenched fists went up to the Princess. 'What troll has bitten you?' he asked. 'What evil herb have you eaten to be so bewitched? How could your heart become inclined to this man?'

"To this Ingegerd gave no answer; she only shrank a step backward in alarm. The King himself became calmer. 'Dear daughter,' he said to her, 'do you not know that I love you? How can I then give you to the man whom I hate? I want my earnest wishes for your happiness to follow you. I want to be able to be your guest. I tell you that you must turn your inclinations to the kings of other lands, for the

Astrid

King of Norway shall never have you.'

"The Princess became so confused at this that she could only say in reply : ' I did not ask you. It was the wish of the people.'

"Whereupon the King asked her whether she thought that the King of Sweden was a thrall, who could not dispose of his own children; whether he had a master over him who could give away his daughter?

" ' Will the King of Sweden allow people to accuse him of breach of faith? ' asked the Princess.

"The Swedish King laughed aloud. ' Don't trouble yourself about that! That will not be said of me. Why do you, a woman, ask about it? I still have men in my council, and they will be able to help in the matter.'

"Then he turned to the warriors among his huntsmen: ' My will is

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fettered by this promise,' he said to them. 'I want to be free from this bond.' But none of the King's men answered a word; none could think of any advice to give him.

"Olof Skötkonung's anger blazed fiercely and he raged like a madman. 'A plague on your wisdom,' he shouted again and again to his councillors. 'I want to be free! Why do people praise your wisdom?'

"But while the King thus raged and stormed, and because no one knew what to answer him, Astrid stepped out of the circle of maidens and proffered a suggestion. But she only made it," she assured Hjalte, "because it seemed to her amusing, and her tongue had been, as it were, itching to bring it forward. She had no idea that it would be found possible or practicable.

" 'Why do you not send me?' she said. 'I am also your daughter. Why

Astrid

do you not send me to the Norwegian King? ’

“ But as soon as Astrid said this Ingegerd became quite pale. ‘ Hold your tongue and go away ! ’ she said angrily. ‘ Go away, you chatterbox ! You mischievous, bad thing to make such a shameful suggestion to my father. ’

“ But the King would not allow Astrid to go. Quite the contrary ! He had stretched out his hand and drawn her to his breast. He laughed and wept, and was as excited with joy as a playful child.

“ ‘ Ah ! ’ he exclaimed. ‘ What an idea ! What a devilish clever trick ! We will call Astrid, Ingegerd ! We will induce the King of Norway to marry her, and when it becomes noised abroad in the land that she is serf-born, many will rejoice at it. Everywhere they will jest at this honourable man. ’

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“But then Ingegerd rushed hastily to the King, and besought him, ‘O father! O father, do not do this! I love King Olaf with all my heart; it grieves me deeply that you will deceive him.’ She added that she would patiently obey her father’s command and give up the idea of marriage with Olaf Haraldson if he would only promise her not to inflict this disgrace upon him.

“But the Swedish King turned a deaf ear to her prayers. He merely turned to Astrid whom he fondled as though she were as sweet as revenge itself. ‘You shall go, you shall go at once—to-morrow,’ he said to her. ‘We must have a ship somewhere that is fit to go to sea. All that you need for a marriage outfit, your clothes, dear daughter, and those of your retinue can be got ready as quickly as possible. The Norwegian King does not think of

Astrid.

such things, he only thinks of the joy of possessing the Swedish King's high-born daughter.'

"When he had so spoken, Ingegerd understood only too well that there was no possibility of altering his resolve. She then went up to her sister, put her arm round her neck, and led her into her own room. She made her sit on her own royal chair, while she herself sat on the low stool at her feet, telling Astrid that she must now sit up there in order to become accustomed as queen, to taking the first place, for Ingegerd did not wish that Olaf should be ashamed of his Queen.

"Then the Princess had sent her other maidens to the wardrobes and store-rooms, in order to fetch the bridal equipment which she had prepared for herself. All this she gave her sister, so that Astrid should not go to the King of Norway like a poor maid. She had

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also reckoned how many men and women servants should accompany her, and had finally presented her with her own beautiful galley. 'You certainly must have my galley,' she said. 'You know what stalwart oarsmen it has, for I wish that you go to the King of Norway with sufficient dignity, so that he may feel himself honoured through his Queen.'

"Afterwards the Princess sat long with her sister and talked with her about King Olaf. But she spoke as one speaks of God's saints and not of kings, and Astrid had not understood much of her talk, but she understood so much that the King's daughter wished to give all the good thoughts which dwelt in her to Astrid, so that King Olaf might not be so much befooled as her father wished. At last Astrid, who after all was not so mischievous as all believed, forgot how

Astrid

often she had been obliged to suffer because of her sister, and wished that she was free so that she could say, 'I will not go.' She even confided this wish of hers to the Princess, so that both wept, and for the first time felt like real sisters."

But Astrid was, as she told Hjalte, not one of those who brood over the past and lament. When her vessel reached the open sea, she had forgotten all anxiety and fear. She had been able to give orders like a ruler, and had been obeyed like a king's daughter. For the first time since her mother's death she had felt happy.

The beautiful King's daughter was silent for a moment when she had ended her narrative. She looked quickly up at Hjalte, who had sat without moving as long as she spoke. She turned pale when she saw the pain depicted on his countenance.

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"Tell me what you think, Hjalte," she exclaimed. "We shall now soon be in Kungahälla. How will it go with me there? Will the King kill me? Will he send me back branded with a red-hot iron? Tell me the truth, Hjalte!"

But Hjalte did not answer her. He sat and talked to himself unconsciously. Astrid overheard him mutter that there was no one over there in Kungahälla who knew Ingegerd, and that he himself felt no inclination to return thither.

But now Hjalte's gloomy look fell upon Astrid, and he began to question her. She had said that she had wished to be free in order to be able to refuse this journey. Well, when she came to Kungahälla she would be free. What did she intend to do? Did she mean to tell King Olaf who she was? That was a question which threw Astrid into

Astrid

complete confusion. She kept silence for a long time. But then she began to beg Hjalte to accompany her to Kungahälla and tell the King the truth. She informed him that the crew of the ship and the maidservants were sworn to secrecy.

“And I myself do not know what to do,” she added. “How can I? I have heard all you told Ingegerd about Olaf Haraldson.”

As Astrid spoke she saw Hjalte again begin to ponder. She heard him murmur that he did not believe she would confess. “But I must tell her what awaits her,” he said to himself.

Then he sat erect and spoke with deep seriousness. “Let me tell you, Astrid, one thing more about King Olaf which I have not told you before. It was when he was but a poor sea-king and possessed only a few good ships and trustworthy warriors, but

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had no share in his father's kingdom. It was when he fought with honour on foreign seas, when he attacked the Vikings, protected merchants, and lent his sword to Christian princes.

“Then the King dreamt one night that a prince of light, a beautiful angel of God came down to his ship, hoisted all the sails, and steered towards the north. And it seemed to the King that they had not sailed for a longer time than a star takes to fade in the dawn when they came to a high and rocky shore broken into by fiords and oversprayed with milk-white foam. But as they approached the shore the angel stretched out his hand and spoke with a silvery voice that sounded louder than the whistling of the wind in the sails and the roaring of the waves which the ship's keel was cutting through with terrible speed. ‘You, King Olaf,’ so the angel spoke, ‘will

Astrid

possess this land for ever.' Then the King awoke from his dream."

But now Hjalte sought to explain to Astrid that just as the red of dawn tempers the transition from night to sun-clear day, so God had not wished that King Olaf should at once perceive that the dream announced to him super-human honour. The King had not understood that it was God's will that he should reign over Norway for ever from one of the thrones of heaven, that kings would come and go, but that King Olaf would rule over his realm for ever.

"The King's humility veiled the full light of the truth," said Hjalte, "and he interpreted the angel's word to mean that he and his descendants would rule over the land which the angel had shown him. And as he believed he recognised his father's kingdom in this land, he directed his course thither, and,

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being favoured by fortune, soon became king over it.

“And so, Astrid, is it in everything. Everything indeed indicates that a heavenly power resides in King Olaf, but he still doubts and thinks that he is called to an earthly kingdom. He does not yet reach after the crown of saints. But now the hour is near when the full consciousness of his task must dawn upon him. Now the hour is near.”

Old Hjalte continued while prophetic light beamed in his soul and on his forehead :

“Is there any woman except Ingegerd who will not be rejected by Olaf Haraldson and thrust from his side when he rises and comprehends the angel's message that he is King of Norway for ever? Is there *one* who can accompany him in his lofty pilgrimage except Ingegerd?”

Astrid

Once more Hjalte turned towards Astrid and asked with great severity, "Answer now and tell me whether you will not confess the truth to King Olaf."

Astrid had become quite abashed. She answered very humbly, "Why will you not go with me to Kungahälla? Then I shall be compelled to reveal everything. Do you not see, Hjalte, that I do not know what I want? I would promise what you ask if I had thought of deceiving the King. I would induce you to proceed on your journey if I really wished that, but now I know that I am weak. I only ask you to accompany me."

But scarcely had she spoken than she saw terrible wrath flame in Hjalte's countenance.

"Why should I help you to escape your hard fate?" he asked. He added that he did not feel obliged to

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show her pity. He hated her because of her sin against her sister. The man whom she had wished to steal for herself, thief that she was, had been Ingegerd's. Hardened warrior though he was, he had to groan for grief when he thought what Ingegerd had suffered. But Astrid had felt nothing. While the noble Princess was suffering Astrid had cruelly interposed with her suggestion and only sought her own advantage. Woe betide her!

Astrid heard Hjalte's voice sink in a gloomy, weird fashion, as though he were mumbling some wizard's spell.

"You are the woman," he said to her, "who has spoilt my finest poem, for the most beautiful poem which the bard Hjalte ever composed was when he sung into union the devoutest of women and the most excellent of men. But you have spoilt the poem and turned it into a farce, and I will punish

you, you offspring of hell! I will punish you as God Almighty punished the tempter who brought sin into His world! I will punish you!

“But do not ask me,” he continued, “to accompany you, woman, in order to shield you from yourself. I think of the Princess and how she suffers from this comedy which you are playing with King Olaf. On her account you must be punished as well as on mine, and I will not accompany you to betray you. That is my vengeance, Astrid, I will not betray you. You will go to Kungahälla, you, Astrid, and if you do not speak yourself you will become the King’s bride, but afterwards, you snake, the punishment will come upon you! Your life will be so grievous that you will daily wish for death.”

Having spoken thus Hjalte turned from her and departed.

Astrid sat there long in silence and

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reflected on what she had heard, but then a smile passed over her face. He forgot, old Hjalte, that she had already tasted all kinds of suffering and that she had learnt to smile at tortures, but happiness—happiness she had never tasted.

And Astrid rose and walked to the tent door. She saw the fierce Hjalte's ship steering towards the West. Far, far in the distance she seemed to see the mist-veiled Iceland which welcomed its much-travelled son with cold and darkness.

III

It is a sunny day in autumn, without the smallest cloud in the sky—the kind of day to make one imagine that the friendly sun wants to give the earth all the light it possesses. The friendly sun is like a mother whose child is about

Astrid

to leave her, and who at the hour of departure cannot turn away her eyes from the beloved face.

In the long valley in which Kungahälla lies are many little mounds covered with beech trees. And now in autumn the trees have put on such glorious apparel as to excite one's astonishment. It looks as though they intended to set out on wooing expeditions, and had clothed themselves in gold and scarlet in order to win rich brides with their splendour.

The great island Hisingen on the other bank of the river is also adorned, but on Hisingen there stand yellow-white birches. The trees there are gaily clad, as though they were maidens dressed to attend the bride. But up the river, which is rushing down to the sea so proudly and impetuously, as though the autumn rain had filled it with effervescent wine, there comes

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ship after ship rowing homewards. And as the ships approach Kungahälla their sails of grey frieze-cloth are changed for fresh white ones. One is reminded of the stories of kings' sons who go out seeking adventures in beggars' rags and cast them away as soon as they re-enter the palace precincts.

All the people of Kungahälla were assembled down on the quays. Old and young were busy unloading the ships' cargoes. They filled the warehouses with barrels of salt and train-oil, with costly weapons and varicoloured fabrics. They hauled the vessels and boats on shore and questioned the crews about their voyage, but suddenly all work ceased, and all turned their eyes to the river. Between the cumbrous merchant-vessels came a great war-galley rowing along. People wondered what sort of a ship it was which hoisted purple-bordered sails, carried a gilt

escutcheon at its prow, and came flying over the waves as lightly as a bird. They praised its crew, who rowed with such an even stroke that the two banks of oars flashed at the sides of the ship like eagles' wings.

"It must be the Swedish Princess coming," they said. "It must be the beautiful Princess Ingegerd whom Olaf Haraldson has waited for through the whole summer and autumn."

The women hastened out on the quays in order to see the Princess whose ship was approaching the palace quay. Men and boys leaped on board the ships and clambered on the roofs of the boat-houses. When the women saw the Princess standing in splendid robes on deck they began to call to her and to greet her with words of welcome, and all the men who saw her face graciously smiling raised their caps and swung them high in the air.

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But below on the palace quay stood King Olaf himself, and when he saw the Princess his face beamed with gladness and his eyes lighted up with tenderness.

Although it was so late in the year that all the flowers had vanished, the young maidens plucked red and yellow autumnal leaves from the trees and strewed them on the quay and on the street. They also hastened to decorate the walls of the houses with gleaming rowan-berries and dark red aspen-leaves.

The Princess, who stood high up on the ship, saw the people who waved their greetings and welcome to her; she saw the red-yellow leaves on which she was to walk. And far forward on the quay she saw the King, who was smiling at her. The Princess forgot all about the confession she was to make. She forgot that she was not Ingegerd. She

Astrid

forgot everything except that she was to become Olaf Haraldson's bride.

One Sunday Olaf Haraldson sat at the midday meal, and his beautiful Queen sat by his side. He talked eagerly with her, leaning his elbow on the table, and turned so that he could see her face. But when Astrid spoke the King lowered his eyes in order to enjoy the charm of her voice alone, and as she talked for a long time he began unconsciously to cut the top of the table with his knife.

All King Olaf's men knew that he would not have done this if he had remembered that it was Sunday, but they had too much reverence for the King to venture to remind him of his oversight.

The longer Astrid talked the more uneasy the warriors became. The Queen indeed saw them interchange

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anxious looks, but knew not the reason. All had finished eating and the dishes had been taken out, but King Olaf still sat there talking with Astrid and cutting the top of the table. Quite a little heap of chips lay before him.

Then at last spoke his friend, Bjorn, son of Ogur, who lived on Seal Island, "What day is to-morrow, Eilif?" he asked, turning to one of the pages.

"To-morrow is Monday," answered Eilif in a high, clear voice.

Then the King lifted his head and looked at Eilif. "Do you say to-morrow is Monday?" he said reflectively. Without saying another word he collected all the chips which he had cut from the table in his hand, went to the hearth, took up a burning coal, and laid it on the chips which at once caught fire. The King stood still and let them burn to ashes in his hand.

Then all his warriors rejoiced, but the young Queen became as pale as a corpse.

“How will he condemn me when once he has found out my sin,” she thought, “he who punishes himself so severely for such a small offence!”

.
Acke of Gardarike lay sick in his vessel in Kungahälla harbour. He lay below deck in his narrow cabin waiting for death. He had long had severe pain in his foot, on which an open wound had broken out. During the last few days the foot had begun to turn black.

“You must not die, Acke,” said Ludolf of Kungahälla, who had come down into the cabin to see after him. “Do you not know that King Olaf is in the town, and that God has given him great powers because of his saintly life and his piety? Send and ask him

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to come to you and lay his hand upon you, then you will live."

"No, I cannot ask help from him," said Acke. "Olaf Haraldson hates me because I killed his foster-brother, Reor the White. If he knew that I was here with my ship in the harbour he would kill me."

But when Ludolf left Acke and entered the town he met the young Queen, who had been in the wood gathering nuts.

"Queen!" Ludolf called to her, "tell King Olaf this: Acke of Gardarike, who killed your foster-brother, lies dying in his ship in the harbour."

The beautiful Queen hastened home, and went to King Olaf, who stood in the courtyard grooming his horse.

"Good news, King Olaf!" she said. "Acke of Gardarike, who killed your foster-brother, lies sick to death in his vessel in the harbour."

Olaf Haraldson at once led his horse into the stall. Then he went without sword and helmet into the street. He walked quickly between the houses till he came down to the harbour. Then he looked for Acke's vessel. The King was down in the cabin with the sick man before it occurred to any of his attendants to try to prevent him.

"Acke," said King Olaf, "many times I have pursued you out there on the open sea, and you have always escaped me. Now sickness has brought you to my town. That is a sign to me that God has given your life into my hand."

Acke did not answer. He was altogether powerless, and death was very near him. Olaf laid his hands on his breast and prayed to God. "Give me this my enemy's life," he said.

But the Queen, who had seen the King hastening down to the harbour

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without helmet and sword, had gone into the palace, fetched his weapons, and called some of his men. She now had come after him to the vessel. But as she stood by the narrow cabin she heard King Olaf pray for the sick man.

Astrid looked in at the King and Acke without betraying her presence. She saw that while the King's hands rested on the dying man's forehead and breast the pallor of death vanished from his face, he began to breathe evenly and softly, ceased to groan, and at last sank into a sweet slumber. Astrid went quietly back to the palace. She had difficulty in carrying the King's sword up the street. Her face was still paler than that of the man who had been dying. The sound of her deep-drawn gasps was almost like that of a death-rattle.

.

It was the morning of All Saints'

Astrid

Day, and King Olaf was preparing to go to Mass. He came out of his palace and crossed over the courtyard to the gate. Many of his attendants stood in the courtyard to accompany him to Mass. When he came out they ranged themselves in two ranks, and the King passed between them.

Astrid stood above on the narrow balcony outside the women's house and looked down upon the King. He wore a broad gold band round his head, and was dressed in a long mantle of red velvet. He walked very quietly, with a solemn and peaceful expression as befitted the day. Astrid felt alarmed when she observed his strong resemblance to the saints and kings whose images stood carved in wood above the altar in the Church of the Virgin.

Down by the door there stood a man in a slouched hat with a great cloak

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cast about him. When the King approached him he let the cloak drop, lifted high a bare sword which he had hidden under it, and rushed at the King. But as he came quite close the glance of King Olaf fell clearly and mildly upon him, and he stopped short in his rush. He let his sword fall to the ground, and sank on his knees. King Olaf stood still and gazed at the man with the same clear look; the latter tried to turn away his eyes from him, but could not. At last he began to sob and weep.

"Oh, King Olaf, King Olaf," he lamented, "your enemies sent me here to kill you, but when I saw the sanctity of your face the sword fell from my hand. Your eyes, King Olaf, have smitten me to the earth."

Astrid sank on her knees as she stood on the balcony. "O God have mercy on me a sinner!" she said. "Woe is

me, woe is me that I became this man's wife through lying and deceit ! ”

IV

IN the evening of All Saints' Day there was full moonlight. The King had gone round the precincts of the palace, and had looked in the stables and the farm-buildings in order to see if everything was in order. He had also been into the cottages where serfs and servants dwelt and seen that they were well looked after. When he turned back towards the palace he saw a woman with a black hood over her head stealing down towards the gate. He thought he recognised her and therefore followed her steps. She went through the gate, crossed the market-place, and stole through the narrow streets to the river.

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Astrid laughed aloud and kissed him. "Do people kill themselves when they are as happy as I am? Does one kill oneself in paradise?"

"I do not understand it," said King Olaf in his quiet way. "God will show me. He will tell me whether it is my fault that you wished to commit so great a sin."

Astrid came up to him and caressed his face. The reverence which she had always felt for King Olaf had hitherto restrained her from displaying the whole tenderness of her affection. Now all at once she embraced him passionately, kissed him repeatedly, and began to speak in a voice which was sweet and musical as a bird's.

"Listen now how strong my love to you is!" she said.

She made King Olaf sit down on an upturned boat, and knelt at his feet.

“King Olaf,” she said, “I will no longer be queen. A woman who loves anyone so much as I love you cannot be queen. I wish you would live deep in the forest and let me be your thrall. There I could serve you every day. I would prepare your food, lay your bed, and guard your cottage while you slept. Only I should wait upon you. When you came home from hunting I would meet you, kneel before you on the road and say ‘King Olaf, my life is yours,’ and you would smile and let your lance-point drop on my breast and say, ‘Yes, your life is mine. You have neither father nor mother; you are mine, and your life is in my hands.’”

As Astrid spoke she took King Olaf’s sword playfully out of its sheath. She placed the hilt in the King’s hand and directed the point towards her heart. “Say now this to me, King Olaf,” she said, “as if we were alone in the wood

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and I were your serf. Say this, 'Your life is mine.' "

"Your life is God's," said the King.

Astrid laughed lightly. "My life is yours," she repeated with great tenderness in her voice, and at the same moment King Olaf perceived that she was pressing the sword-point against her breast. But the King held his sword with a steady hand even in play. He snatched it towards him before Astrid had done herself any harm.

Then he sprang up. For the first time in his life he was so frightened that he trembled. The Queen had wished to die by his hand, and had nearly succeeded in doing so. But at the same moment a thought flashed through him like an inspiration, so that he understood what was the reason of her despair. "She has done wrong," he thought. "She has a sin on her conscience." He stooped down over Astrid. "Tell me,

Astrid

what have you done? ” he said. Astrid had cast herself on the rough planks of the quay with despairing sobs.

“No innocent woman weeps like that,” thought the King. “But how can the noble King’s daughter have brought upon herself such a grievous burden? ” he asked himself. “How can the stately Ingegerd have a crime upon her conscience? ”

“Ingegerd, tell me what wrong have you committed? ” he asked again.

But Astrid’s voice was choked with sobs and she could not answer. Instead, she took off her gleaming rings and bracelets, and with averted face handed them to the King.

The King only thought how out of keeping all this was with the character of the devout Princess as depicted by Hjalte. “Is this Hjalte’s Ingegerd who is sobbing at my feet? ” he thought. He stooped down and took

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Astrid by the shoulders. "Who are you? Who are you?" he said, shaking her arm. "I see that you are not Ingegerd. Who are you?"

But Astrid continued to sob so that she could not answer, but in order to give the King some kind of answer to his question she let her long hair down and twisted a lock of it round her arm, which she stretched towards the King. She sat there waiting with bowed back and bent head.

The King thought, "She wants to confess that she is one of those who wear fetters. She means to say that she is a serf." Again by a flash of inspiration he understood the connection. "Has not the Swedish King a daughter who is a serf's child?" he asked suddenly.

Not a word came from Astrid, but only redoubled sobs.

"Has the King of Sweden," asked

King Olaf again, "not given me the child of his queen, but sent me the bondswoman's daughter?"

To this, also there came no answer, but he heard Astrid shiver and her teeth chatter as if from cold.

King Olaf put yet another question. "Are you," he said, "whom I have made my wife, of such a grovelling nature that you can be made a tool to bring about a man's disgrace? Are you so low-minded that you rejoiced that his enemies would mock their dupe?"

Astrid perceived by the tones of the King's voice how bitterly he felt the disgrace which had been put upon him. This made her forget her own grief, and she ceased to weep. "Take my life," she said.

A severe temptation came upon King Olaf. "Slay the wretched creature!" was his natural prompting. "Show the

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King of Sweden what it costs to play his pranks on the King of Norway!"

At that moment King Olaf did not feel a spark of love for Astrid. He hated her because she had been the instrument of his humiliation. He knew that all would praise him if he requited evil with evil. But if he allowed the insult to pass unavenged the bards would make merry at his expense, and his enemies would cease to fear him.

He had only one desire—to strike Astrid down and to extinguish her life. His anger was so intense that he thirsted for blood. Suppose a court-fool had dared to come and set his fool's cap on the King's head, would he not tear it in pieces, throw it on the ground and trample on it? Suppose he laid Astrid's bleeding corpse on her ship and sent her back to her father, would it not be said of him that he was a worthy scion of the great King Hárfager?

Astrid

But King Olaf still held his sword in his hand, and under his fingers he felt the hilt on the gold of which he had once caused to be engraved the words "Blessed are the peace-makers! Blessed are the meek! Blessed are the merciful!" And each time that in his present anguish he grasped the sword tightly in order to strike Astrid down he felt these words under his hand. He thought he could feel each separate letter. He remembered the day on which he had heard these words for the first time. "This shall stand in golden letters on the hilt of my sword," he had said, "so that the words may burn my hand if I raise my sword in mere fury or in an unrighteous cause."

Now he felt how the hilt was burning his hand, King Olaf said to himself, "Formerly you were the slave of many vices; now you have only one Lord, and that is God."

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With these words he thrust the sword into the sheath, and began to walk up and down on the quay. Astrid still lay prostrate as before. King Olaf saw how she winced in fear of death every time that he passed her.

"I shall not kill you," he said to Astrid, but his voice sounded hard with hatred.

Still for a time King Olaf continued to walk up and down the quay. Then he came to Astrid and asked her name in the same hard voice, and this time she could answer. King Olaf now saw how this woman whom he had prized so highly now lay on the quay like an animal which had been hurt to death. He looked down upon her somewhat as a dead man's spirit looks down in pity on the poor body which once sheltered it.

"Oh my soul!" said King Olaf.
"Here once you dwelt in love, now you

Astrid

are as homeless as a beggar." He came nearer to Astrid, and spoke as if she were lifeless and could not hear what he said. "They told me that there was a king's daughter whose heart was so pure and holy that she instilled peace into every one who came near her. They spoke to me of her gentleness which was such that whosoever saw her felt sheltered as a helpless child with his mother. And when this beautiful woman who lies here came to me I believed she was Ingegerd, and she became very precious to me. She was kind and cheerful, and made my heavy hours light. Even when she sometimes so spoke and acted that I wondered at it in the proud Ingegerd, she was too precious for me to doubt her. She stole into my heart with her blitheness and her beauty."

He was silent a while, and thought how dear Astrid had been to him, and

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how, with her, happiness had come into his house.

"I could forgive her," he then said aloud, "I could make her my queen again, I could lift her up in love in my arms, but that I cannot do, for my soul would still remain homeless. Oh, you beautiful creature," he said, "why has deceit taken up its dwelling in you? With you one can have no confidence, no comfort!"

He would have uttered further laments, but now Astrid rose.

"King Olaf, speak not so to me," she said. "I would rather die. Remember that it is my serious wish."

Thereupon she tried to say some words in her own defence. She told him how she had travelled to Kungahälla not with any idea of deceiving him, but in order to be a princess for a few weeks, to have servants about her, and to sail on the sea. But she

had intended to confess who she was as soon as she had reached Kungahälla. She expected to find Hjalte there, and other chiefs who knew Ingegerd. It did not occur to her that it would be possible for her to play a part on her arrival, but as though by the plotting of some evil power all those who knew Ingegerd were absent, and so she was seduced into deceit.

“When I saw you, King Olaf,” she said, “I forgot everything else in order to be yours, and I thought I would gladly let myself be killed if I had only been your wife for a single day.”

King Olaf answered, “Yes, I understand that what was deadly earnest for me was sport for you. You never reflected what it meant to come to a man and to say ‘I am she whom you so intensely long for. I am the high-born maiden whom to win is the greatest honour you can have.’ And

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now you prove not to be this woman, but a *deceitful serving maid*."

"I have loved you ever since I heard your name," said Astrid softly.

The King clenched his fist wrathfully against her. "Know, Astrid, that I longed for Ingegerd as no man has ever longed for a woman. I wished to hold fast to her as the soul of a dead man does to the angel who bears it upwards. I believed she was so devout that she would help me to lead a holy life."

Then he broke out into an utterance of wild longing, and told her how he yearned for the power which the saints of the Lord possessed, but that he was too weak and sinful to reach perfection. "But the King's daughter would have helped me," he said. "Yes, the lovely angel would have helped me.

"Oh God," he continued, "wherever I turn I see sinners; wherever I go I meet those who entice me to sin.

Astrid

Why didst Thou not let the King's daughter come who has no evil thoughts in her heart. Her gentle eyes would have found out the right path for me. Whenever I might have been about to transgress Thy commandment her gentle hand would have held me back."

A profound feeling of exhaustion and weariness of despair descended on Olaf Haraldson. "That was what I hoped for," he said, "to have a good being by my side, and not to wander always alone amid savagery and cunning. Now I feel that I shall succumb. I cannot hold out longer.

"Have I not asked God," he exclaimed, "what place I hold before Him? For what purpose, oh Lord of souls, hast Thou chosen me? Am I intended to be the equal of apostles and martyrs?

"But now, Astrid, I need ask no

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more. God has not chosen to give me the woman who would have supported me in my wanderings. Now I know that I shall never win the crown of saints."

The King ceased speaking, unconsoled in his despair. Astrid came nearer to him.

"King Olaf," she said, "what you say both the Princess and Hjalte told me long ago, but I would not believe that you were anything more than a good brave hero and a noble king. Only now, when I have lived some weeks under your roof, has my soul begun to fear you. I have realised that it is worse than death to come before you with a lie on one's tongue.

"Nothing frightened me so much," continued Astrid, "as when I understood that you were a saint—when I saw the chips of wood burn in your hand, when I beheld sickness fly at your behest, and the sword drop from

Astrid

your enemy's hand as he approached you! The fact that you are a saint has frightened me to death, and I determined to die before you knew that I had deceived you."

King Olaf did not answer. Astrid looked up at him. His eyes were directed to heaven, and she knew not whether he heard her.

"This present moment," she said, "I have feared every day and every hour since I came here. Would that I had died before passing through it!"

Still Olaf Haraldson kept silence.

"King Olaf," she said, "I wished to do something for you, to give you my life. I meant to cast myself into the grey river in order that you should not have a liar at your side. The more I saw of your saintliness the more clearly I recognised that I must leave you. A saint of God cannot have a false maid to wife."

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Still the King kept silence, but now Astrid lifted her eyes to his face and exclaimed, "King Olaf, your face is shining."

While Astrid had been speaking it seemed to King Olaf that his eyes had been opened to behold a vision. He saw all the stars of heaven leave their place and fly round the sky like a swarm of bees. But suddenly they had all united above his head and formed a gleaming crown.

"Astrid," he said with a quivering voice, "God has spoken to me. It is as you say. I will be God's saint."

His voice trembled with emotion, and his face shone in the night. But when Astrid saw the light which beamed round his head she rose. Her last hope was extinguished.

"Now I will go," she said. "Now that you know who you are you can never bear me any more at your side."

Astrid

But think of me kindly. All my days I lived without happiness and joy. Remember I have been beaten, I have gone in rags. Pardon me when I am gone. My love has not injured you."

As Astrid, in deep despair, was walking away on the quay, Olaf Haraldson woke out of his transport. He hastened after her.

"Why will you go?" he said.
"Why will you go?"

"Must I not go now when you are a saint?" she whispered almost inaudibly.

"You must never go on that account; it is just now that it is clear to me that you can stay," said King Olaf. "I was a small man before, and had to tremble before everything evil. I was a poor earthly king, too poor to extend favour to you, but now heaven's power has been given to me. If you are weak I am strong through the Lord. If you fall I can raise you up. God

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has chosen me, Astrid; you cannot injure me, but I can help you. Ah, how I talk! At this moment God has poured His love into my heart so richly that I do not even know if you have done wrong."

And with great gentleness he lifted her trembling form, and supporting her as she still sobbed and could scarcely hold herself upright, he went with her back to the palace.

MARGARETA FREDKULLA

THIS is what befell when Margareta Fredkulla, who was to ride to Norway to wed Magnus Barfot, came to the village of Storgård in West Gothland, which lies on the southern bank of the river, a little above Kungahälla.

First of all the two old crones, Karin Wullum and Valborg Toot, who had been in the great forest to gather moss, had caught a glimpse of the Princess from a lofty cliff. They at once threw down their burdens and hastened to the village to announce that something fine and beautiful was coming from far away over the forest-path, and that men in goodly attire were marching under the trees. But none of those who heard

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them believed them. "Out on your bleared old eyes," they shouted at them. "It cannot be a princess; it was certainly nothing but the moorland mist floating among the red fir-stems."

Immediately after the women came Rasmus, the charcoal-burner's boy, running. His eyes glowed, and he was so breathless when he reached the village that he could hardly speak. But as soon as he could bring any words out he shouted at the top of his voice, "Rejoice! The Princess is coming! I have seen the beauty riding slowly under the trees. Rejoice!"

Rasmus, the charcoal-burner's boy, had halted at the three-cornered space in the centre of the village where three roads meet. Two or three peasants were standing there and saying to each other in undertones that war with Norway would soon break out again, and when they heard Rasmus they thought

that he was making game of their misfortunes. "Bear-cub!" they said, threatening him with their fists, "hold your tongue if your life is dear to you! Not a word more of that, you oaf!"

But Rasmus, the charcoal-burner's boy, was not so easily silenced. He recommenced his chant, "The Princess is coming! I heard the silent birds of the pine forest twittering to greet her. As she passed on the squirrel leapt down from the tree-top and sat silent on the lowest branch, his tail upright and his eyes like coals of fire, and the wood-grouse flew up between the trees with a noise like thunder."

As he spoke Per, the smith, rushed forward and took Rasmus, the charcoal-burner's boy, by the ear. "The Princess!" he hissed at him, "you say you have seen the Princess! It was a fairy, do you understand, a beautiful wood-fairy! The Princess is not

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coming! God have mercy! The Princess is not coming!"

But although no one would believe the report it ran through the village in a moment, and people came from all sides down to the open space to hear what the boy had to say. In the wars of recent years the village of Storgård had been for the greater part burnt down, and consisted mostly of blackened plots of ground on which, from fear of another war, no one had dared to build new houses. But from cellars and wretched caves in the earth where they lived they came stealthily, emaciated and in rags. They walked very quietly, and hardly ventured to go up to Rasmus, the charcoal-burner's boy, as though they had not the courage to hear his message.

But when Per, the smith, saw that more and more of them kept coming he pinched the boy's ear so hard that he

whimpered. At the same time the smith tried to persuade the boy to be silent. "You must not play jests with us poor peasants who live on the frontier in these bad times when the kings of the North do not keep peace," he said. "We are sheep who are separated from the herd. We are hunted by bears; we are hurled down precipices. Every day and every hour we look into the grim face of death."

While the smith was speaking still more and more peasants came flocking to the place. One of them was named Hallvard. The previous day he had been so sure that war would break out anew that he had placed his treasure-chest on the highway and invited all the passers-by to take out of it what they liked. Then there came the people of Västergarden, who had converted all their hereditary property into beer-barrels and feasts, and waited for war

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while they wallowed in bestiality. Lastly came people from a little farm quite at the end of the village, who had just burnt up all their hay and killed their cattle, so that the Norwegians should not be able to use them.

When the smith saw all these people coming still, quiet and silent, but with eyes in which *madness gleamed*, he felt frightened of what they might do if they were beguiled into false hopes of peace. "Don't you understand that it was a wood-fairy?" he said again to Rasmus, and spoke loud so that all should hear him. "She goes about there in the wood, and smiles and beckons and turns the heads of you charcoal-burners. You can well imagine that the wood-fairy knows that last summer at Kungahälla King Inge had a meeting with the Norwegian King Magnus to treat about peace, and since the wood-fairy can guess that we all go about peering and

looking out for the Princess who will bring peace, she sets about bewitching our senses, and shows herself in the form of a princess. The trolls like to play such practical jokes.”

Rasmus, the charcoal-burner's boy, stood still and listened quite obediently to Per, the smith, so that the latter believed he had persuaded him and let him go, but no sooner was Rasmus free than he began to cry louder than before, “The Princess is coming! I have seen the Princess!” And in order to win credence he began to describe her crown, which was like a flower with pearls for dew, and her saddle-cover, which was as bright as the red fly-agaric.

But just then the old crone, Sigrid Torsdotter, stepped out of the crowd. She swung her staff high in the air and began to exclaim, “Who is it that says the Princess is coming? It is I who know, I, what is coming. The whole

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long winter I sat alone in my cottage and watched the smoke eddying up from the hearth, and every evening it was full of signs and omens. It was filled before my eyes with forms carrying lance and shield, and I know what it signifies when the smoke is full of warriors. They are forerunners of others, who, in a dark night while we are fast asleep, come stealing up to our houses. We do not hear them when they come, for we are asleep, but we wake when the red cock begins to crow on the roof, when we are half-choked in our smoke-filled cottages, when the men of the Norwegian King raise their cry of victory before the burning walls."

All the people shuddered with fear when they heard Sigrid Torsdotter, but the charcoal-burner's boy set himself right in her way. "I don't care a snap of the fingers for your cloud of smoke!"

he said. "I have seen the Princess. Her face shone delicate and beautiful under her crown."

Per, the smith, who feared for the disappointed hopes of the poor men, rushed on Rasmus, dragged him to the earth-cave where his smithy was, and rolled before the entrance a great stone which served as a door.

But Rasmus cried ceaselessly, "I have seen the Princess, and I think you should rejoice that she is coming."

But hardly had Per, the smith, got rid of the charcoal-burner's boy than a man who had wandered about as an outlaw for several years in the great forest came down to the village. He looked like a wild animal in his dress of skins and with his long, unclipped beard, but he laughed aloud with joy as he came running, and swung a green branch over his head as a token of peace. He ran through the whole village, stood

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still by each of the black scorched plots of ground, and called so loud that the people down in the dark cellars heard him. "*The Princess is coming; I have seen the Princess!*"

So the outlaw came to the great house of Folke, the district judge, and shouted there as loud as in other places. But Folke, who heard him, came up the cellar steps, an aged, stooping man, and called to him, "Peace be with you, outlaw. You must not come with lies to induce us to pardon you. I revoke the sentence of outlawry upon you. You need not return to the forest. We ourselves are equally outlawed, and cannot pass sentence of outlawry on anyone else."

"Why will you not believe me?" said the outlaw. "Do you not know that King Inge has promised to send in spring the maiden who brings peace?"

As he spoke the old man looked at

him with weary, hopeless eyes. "I do not know that there is any spring now," he said. "Friend, for us poor farmers autumn and spring are the same. As far as we are concerned the snow may lie undisturbed on the fields; we will not furrow it with our ploughs. The rain may hang in the clouds, and the seed lie still in the earth without germinating and sprouting. We shall neither sow nor reap. We sit still and wait for ruin."

But in the meantime there came poor huntsmen and serfs who had run away from their masters out of the forest and brought fresh news to the people assembled at the three-cornered market-place.

In many eyes hope began to brighten; only the old crone, Sigrid Torsdotter, still sat gloomily there, talking about her dreams. "Woe to him who hopes before he has seen the Princess with his own eyes," she exclaimed. "When

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the silver hoofs of her horse gleam on the edge of the wood, when her pearly crown shines in the valley, then it will be time for the frontier-peasants to begin to hope."

Hardly had she spoken than Karin Wullum and Valborg Toot cried, "Mother of God, help us!" and looked up towards the edge of the wood, where the path ran out of the thick forest as out of a vaulted cellar.

Then all began to cry confusedly, "Come here and see! What is that? Mother of God, help us! Shade your eyes with your hand and look up towards the wood! Cross yourselves and look towards the wood! Is it not a maiden who comes there with her splendid retinue? Can't you see them?"

All the terrified and barbarised people began to call and stretch out their hands. "Is it not a wood-fairy?" they cried. "Is it not some witchcraft

of the trolls? Is it the Princess that we see? ”

They cast themselves on their knees and began to pray and sing hymns. They ran to the belfry and rang the bells in order to try whether the beautiful maiden was a troll who feared bell-ringing.

But when old Sigrid Torsdotter, with her far-sighted eyes, saw that a young maiden came riding out of the dark wood she hesitated no longer, but was the first to call out, “Oh you love, you dear one, you morning-light and flower! You are not a wood-fairy; you are a king’s daughter! Thank and praise the Lord! To think, dear one, that you have come at last, riding down our valley! ”

Sigrid Torsdotter swung her staff high above her head, and, followed by all the people, hastened to meet the Princess. “You love, you dear one,

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you morning-light and flower!" they all called out to her, and when they were quite close to her they cried, "You dear one, how beautiful you look under the crown! Throw back your silken veil and let us see you clearly!"

They pressed close up to the great black horse, who paced solemnly on in his purple covering, large plumes waving at his ear, his mane plaited and bound with gold strings.

"You dear, you kind one!" they cried. "How tame the great black horse is! To think that you have come at last!"

As Margareta Fredkulla came riding she was followed by many noble knights and ladies from her father's land, but before her horse walked a poor peasant who carried a broken lance in his hand, and cried unceasingly, "Here rides the beautiful peace-maiden! Here rides Margareta Fredkulla!"

Margareta Fredkulla

During her whole ride along the frontier district she had seen how peace and joy spread among the people. Wherever she came she had seen peasants commencing to plough and housewives laying linen out to bleach. Hungry cattle were being led to pasture; young maidens had again ventured to adorn themselves with bracelets and rings. Helmets and swords had been thrown into the weapon-chests.

Wherever she had passed women and children had come to meet her with flowers and fresh spring leaves. Above, deep in the forest, the old half-savage charcoal-burner had hastened to invite her into his hut, and set frozen berries before her.

But never had the beautiful King's daughter been welcomed with so much joy as in the village of Storgård. A couple of men took the horse by the bridle to lead it carefully down the steep

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descent. "God bless you!" they cried to her. "God bless your beautiful face! God bless you, Fredkulla!"

While the procession moved slowly down to the village of Storgård the peasants ran along by the King's daughter, and told her breathlessly how they had suffered and waited. They told her all that they had endured during the long period of war.

When at last they reached the three-cornered market-place Fredkulla took the reins herself and made her great steed halt. She had never before seen so much misery. She looked at the blackened sites, the pillaged houses, the poor men, and her eyes filled with tears. But then the peasants' wives kissed her hands and told her that they were no longer troubled now that she had come. Now that they had the peace-maiden in their midst their sorrows were over. "Don't think of us,

Margareta Fredkulla

Fredkulla!" they said. "Don't think of our misery! Think of King Magnus, the noble hero to whom you will belong. Smile on him kindly. Stroke in fancy his long, blond, silky hair."

And as she still sat silent on the horse and wept, they all began to comfort her. "This is not the time to weep, maiden," they cried. "See here is the river, and on the other bank is Norway; there is Kungahälla with its many ships where your bridegroom awaits you. God bless you! He will surely rejoice in the hour when he embraces you."

"See, maiden, now they know all along the river-shores that you are come! See the beacons of joy they have kindled on all the hills! See the people streaming down to the river! And hear how they have already learnt over there to cry 'Hail, Fredkulla!' You can hear the words—how clearly they come over the water."

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Fredkulla, however, refused to be comforted. Still in a troubled mood, she kept her horse still, and let her eyes wander from one to the other. She saw them clothed in rags and looking ill; she saw they had been so barbarised that they hardly looked human. Then she raised her hand as a sign that she wished to speak, and there was silence around her.

So Margareta Fredkulla spoke in the three-cornered market-place of the burnt-down village of Storgård, and all the poor people listened, as did also the noble knights and ladies who were in her retinue. "I wish you all to remember the vow I now take before God and all His saints. So long as I have words on my tongue, so long as I have blood in my heart, I will devote myself to the work of peace." Here she paused as though she understood that there lurked a danger in her vow, and then

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she added, "Even though it should cost me my happiness and life."

When the King's daughter had made her vow she looked up cheerfully and wept no more. She urged her horse forward on the path leading down to the ferry. But there sat by the green edge of the path a little shepherd boy. He was as full of joy as the rest, and wished to give the Princess the best he had, so he began to sing her a little love-song about a king far away in the north who longed for the daughter of the Emperor in the East. And again Fredkulla sat still on her horse and listened to the boy who sang in a high, clear voice.

"There is one who me compelleth
Day and night on her to muse,
All my other joys she killeth,
All their coaxings I refuse.
Black her tresses, and she smiteth
With her black eyes like a spear;
Peerless, she my heart delighteth,
She, the Emperor's daughter dear.

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"Costlier gem no palace vaunteth
Than a wife to grace the home,
Yearning, like a pale ghost, haunteth
Me, where'er my footsteps roam;
Fear besets me in my council,
Fear attends me when I ride,
Fear that I shall never, never
Call the Emperor's daughter 'bride.' "

Such was the song, and when the King's daughter had heard it to the end she smiled at the boy and asked him who had composed it.

There was no one there sharp enough to stop the shepherd boy, and he answered, proud of his knowledge, "It was King Magnus who composed this song in honour of the Emperor's daughter."

The words sent a pang through the gentle Fredkulla. "Has King Magnus composed it?" she exclaimed. "What have I then to do with him, who is consumed with longing for the Emperor's daughter in the East? For me he has composed no song which passes from mouth to mouth all over

the land. For me he has no love in his heart."

In great alarm the poor peasants heard the Princess call to her retinue, "Oh worthy knights and kind ladies, conduct me home again. Have mercy on me, you faithful servants of my father. Let me escape from going to King Magnus. Did you not hear the song? It is not for me that this man is longing for, but a beautiful Emperor's daughter."

As Fredkulla said this she heard the people who stood all along the way calling loudly, "Hail, Fredkulla!" And from all the thousands who were streaming out of great Kungahälla to meet her there rose a many-voiced echo, "Hail, Fredkulla!"

But the maiden continued to lament and beseech them, "Worthy knights and noble ladies, conduct me home! Did you not hear the song? We are committing a sin against the King. I

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will not gain by force the title of queen. I only want to go home."

All the time those who stood far off along the river-shores continued to cry, "Fredkulla! Fredkulla!"

Then Fredkulla put her hands before her ears. She had already turned her horse and urged it forward with a shrill cry. "Would that the people would be quiet!" she said. "They shout 'Fredkulla!' but there will probably be peace even if I do not come. King Magnus will not begin a war on my account. He will only be glad if I turn home again."

Still those who stood farther off by the wayside and waited continued to cry "Fredkulla!" but those who stood near began to question and wonder, "Whither is she riding? Whither is she riding?" And when they saw that she was about to ride back to the forest they rushed after her.

Margareta Fredkulla

“Listen, King’s daughter, to what this old woman is saying,” they cried.

“My head is weak with the burden of years,” she said. “Shall war rob me of my son?”

“Now, King’s daughter!” they cried. “Now all doors in the whole valley will be barred again. Now the weapon-chests will be opened. The peasant will tear the ploughshare out of the ground. Why do you hold your hands before your ears? You must listen, listen, listen!”

“Fredkulla,” they cried, while they panted after her, “you bear your name in vain! Fredkulla, we do not dare to sow our seed in the earth! Fredkulla, our daughters will have no marriages this year! Fredkulla, if our farms are burnt down our old women will set up pillories on the blackened sites, and will engrave your name on them. Fredkulla, Fredkulla!”

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The whole population of the village of Storgård was behind her. They shouted around her, all the unhappy creatures. "Fredkulla, think of us when we fall! When our cattle are stolen, think of us! When we avenge our blood-relatives, think of us! When we commit wild deeds, think of us! Think of us as we shall always think of you! You cannot ride home, maiden! You cannot ride away from us! What did you promise just now, you vow-breaker? Do you hear what people are calling to you from the other side of the river?"

And the people from the village of Storgård surrounded Fredkulla, and cast themselves before her on the way. "Only over our bodies, maiden, can you ride," they cried. But some kissed her hands and begged gently and earnestly, "Oh stay! Do not leave us!"

She saw that they did not wish to do

Margareta Fredkulla

her any harm, but the poor, miserable, war-weary people were at their wits' end. Some clutched at her horse's reins in order to turn it.

Then Fredkulla reined in her horse, although she knew well that she could ride home uninjured, for although there were wild men there from the forest and some outlaws among them, to whom she had promised pardon and who brandished their knives threateningly against her, at the same time they continued to kiss her garment's hem. She made her riding-whip whistle through the air and cried, "Make way! Make way!"

When the peasants saw that, they shrank back from her, and stood paralysed with despair. They saw that she was burdened by such a fear that they did not venture to beg for her mercy. "Be it as you will, maiden!" they cried. "Your way is open."

Fredkulla sat motionless, and her

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longing looks were directed to the forest-clothed hills in the distance. Behind them lay the home to which she wished to flee as a wounded animal flies to its cave. For a long time she sat there with eyes staring vacantly before her. They were so hot that every tear in them had been dried up.

Then the King's daughter turned her horse round quite quietly, and rode down again into the valley. She turned round alone, without compulsion, out of love for the great beauty of peace. This time the descent into the valley was not quick and cheerful, but deliberate, step by step. Fredkulla rode gently down the wooded incline to the village of Storgård, past the blackened sites, to the river and the ferry.

The people crept silently behind her, and whispered to each other to leave the maiden undisturbed. No one should venture to praise her deed.

Margareta Fredkulla

As Fredkulla was being carried across the river in the great ferry-boat she dismounted from her horse and stood gazing into the water. Then she began to talk to herself in an undertone. "Do you see this great river," she said, "which flows inexorably to the sea? The gentle ripples dare not hesitate to cast themselves into the embrace of the strong ocean although it seems bitter and terrible. And even if they find a little reed-fringed creek on their way they cannot linger there, nor if they would fain return to their peaceful birthplace in the deep recesses of the wood they can never do so. They must flow onward, ceaselessly and inexorably onward. So is it with destiny. We, like gentle wavelets, must be poured into the world's tumult to modify its bitterness."

Meanwhile two stately cavaliers were riding out from Kungahälla and

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approaching the landing-place of the ferry.

Now the maiden can lift her downcast eyes and see King Magnus. On his helmet shines the golden lion which is his crest; it flutters from the banneret above him, and is blazoned on his red silken garments. She can see him, the Lion of the North; she can behold how his silken, blond hair waves on his shoulders; she can view his proud bearing, and catch the imperious glance of his eye.

Now he is coming! A cloud of dust rises before him! He is coming! His black shadow in the evening sunlight passes across the field, and the ground trembles under his horse's tread. Raise your eyes, maiden, and smile at your bridegroom. Forget that you would rather cast yourself beneath the rapid thundering horse-hoofs to meet your death!

THE QUEEN ON THE ISLAND OF RAGNILD

THERE was once a king who came riding from the East along the Nordre River towards Kungahälla. The year was approaching its end. The air was heavy and the sky grey, as it often is at that season.

The path on which the King rode wound over hillocks along the shore. Here and there willow bushes diversified the sedge-covered mounds, and they had lined themselves along the path, as though curious to see who was riding by. They even crowded across the way, so that the King had difficulty in leading his horse through them.

It was so late in the year that all the

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trees and bushes were leafless, and all life in meadow and wood had ceased. On the ground the leaves of summer lay pale and withered, and had been beaten down by the long-continued autumn rains into a colourless coverlet under which countless spiders and snails lay buried in their winter sleep.

The atmosphere was grey and cloudy, and the King thought, "This is not exactly a beautiful road for a king to ride on."

But close to the edge of the marshy road along the shore there rose the beautiful Fontin Mountain. At its foot it was surrounded by a ring of clear yellow sand, then rose perpendicularly a bare mountain wall, above which a row of bluish-green pine trees ran out on a narrow terrace. Higher up came a mass of split rock through which trickled small clear runnels, then a row of birches with white stems and a reddish-brown net-

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work of branches, then again a stratum of sand. But above the sand the mountain rose with mighty greyish-red cliff-like walls up to the deep green fir-wood, which grew densely and vigorously on the flat summit of the mountain. But the King had no pleasure in being so near the picturesque mountain, for wreaths of mist encircled the mountain wall, and wisps of cloud overhung it, and from all the rock-clefts and clumps of trees there rose grey rain-smoke. And so it happened that the many-coloured Fontin Mountain seemed to the King as grey as any other.

He sighed heavily and deeply as he rode through the willow bushes, which shook off on him and his horse a shower of great drops. All at once he felt almost more depressed than he had ever been before. "So it always happens with me," he thought. "It is always grey and rainy wherever I come. If I

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sail on the sea a fog rises so that I cannot see my hand before me, and if I ride at night the moon buries itself in the blackest cloud in order not to have to give me light. I even believe if I got to heaven all the stars would go out there. So it is with everything I undertake," he exclaimed, clenching his fist as he rode along. "Other kings win honour and renown, glory and fame, but I am a regular king of shreds and patches. I have only to think of rebellion, and straightway the greater part of my land refuses to obey me. It was otherwise with the ancient kings who reigned in Upsala. For them it was a fine thing to be king. God must have ordained it always to be so with me," he said to himself.

But at the same time he fought against this conviction. He halted his steed and listened for the twittering of birds. That would have served him

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for a sign that he was mistaken, but the sky was one uniform grey, the mountain was veiled in mist, and all the birds had departed. The only sound audible from the surrounding marshes was the light drip of water-drops which had rolled so far forward on the willow branches that they could not remain any longer, but were obliged to fall.

The King's head drooped lower. "I should like to see something blazing red!" he exclaimed. "Something raven-black with a gold gleam in its depths! I should like to hear clear song and ringing laughter!"

Again he looked round him, but everything was the same, and he noticed that the generally glittering river flowed dark as night between its reedy banks. Then he became so depressed that everything which he possessed seemed to him ugly and

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worthless. His well-built palace seemed to him a wretched forest hut. All his victories turned into defeats, and all his subjects seemed to him either contemptible rascals or poor beggars. "But I could endure all this," he thought, "were it not for my Queen. That is the hardest of all. Life is difficult enough anyhow without the additional torment of thinking about a woman. The anxiety I suffer on account of the state is such as to leave me not a single hour of peace, and yet my people require me to undertake a fresh burden."

The fact was that the King had been wedded to a Norwegian Princess. She was rich and powerful, and had the title of his Queen, but as ill-luck would have it, the King had been wedded to her when she was still a child. This arrangement had been made so that no one else should come and carry

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her off, but now it seemed to the King that he would much rather have lost her.

From the day of her marriage the Queen had lived on a little rocky island which lay in the Nordre River exactly opposite Kungahälla, and was called Ragnhildsholm. There a stone tower had been built in which she might grow up in safety until she was of sufficient age for her husband to take her to his palace.

But the King had remained at home all the time, and they had never met, and although he knew well that the Queen had grown up, and though many reminded him that he should now bring her home, he could not make up his mind to do so. He pleaded the excuse of commotions in the kingdom and of difficult times, and year after year he let the Queen remain in the grey tower with some elderly women who attended

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her, and with nothing else to look at than the grey river.

Now at last he was on his way to fetch her, but while he continued to think about her on the way such a feeling of depression had come over him that he had separated himself from his retinue in order to ride alone, and to fight undisturbed with his trouble. He had now emerged from the willow bushes and was riding over a broad plain. If it had been summer-time he would have seen here large droves of cattle and flocks of sheep, but now the plain was altogether deserted, affording nothing to look at but the trampled ground and the hillocks, off which the grass had been eaten. The King spurred on his horse, and rode over the plain as fast as he could in order not to become more depressed than he already was.

He was a brave man, and if the

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King's daughter had been imprisoned in an enchanted castle, guarded by giants and dragons, he would have ridden thither at full gallop to release her, but now, as ill-luck would have it, she sat safely in her tower waiting for him, and no one in the world disputed his possession of her. He now repented bitterly having married her. "Everything great and noble and beautiful is denied me," he said. "I am not even allowed to win my wife by fighting for her."

He rode on more and more slowly, for now the path ascended a steep hillside, underneath which began the long road leading to Kungahälla. But from the top of the hill the King saw distinctly before him the little island of Ragnild where his Queen was waiting for him. He saw its depressing situation in the midst of the black Alf; he saw the grey turf-ramparts rise, from the

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colourless soil, and the grey stone walls of the tower. It all appeared to him uncanny and alarming. No heath reddened on any hillock, not a green blade of grass gleamed on the ramparts. Autumn, in passing over the land, had carried them all away.

What the King longed to see was bright crimson and deep black with a glint of gold in it, and this seemed a very unlikely place to find it. The more he looked at the tower the more it looked as though it had grown out of the rock itself. It seemed impossible that it had been erected by human hands in the ordinary way. The mountain itself had conceived a sudden wish to grow, as the earth grows into trees and grass, and this tower was the result. And he understood why it looked so grey, uncanny, and depressing.

When he thought of his Queen, who had grown up there, he believed she

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must resemble a roughly hewn stone statue such as he had seen over the door of a church. He thought of her as a grey figure with long, immobile face, flat body, and hands and feet twice as long and broad as anyone's had ever been. "But that is my fate," thought the King, and rode on. He came so near to the ferry that the sentinel on the other side raised the horn to his lips to announce his arrival. The drawbridge was lowered, and the gate of the strong tower opened for him.

But then the King lifted his head and reined his horse in. "I am a king after all," he said, "and no man can compel me to do what I do not wish. No one in the whole world can oblige me to meet this stone image. I ought to derive some advantage from being a king."

With that he turned his horse round and rode back the same way by which

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he had come. He rode in tempestuous haste, as though he feared being caught, and did not slacken rein until he reached the willow bushes in the shore-meadows by the Fontin Mountain.

The Queen had to sit on in the tower mourning and pining. She had soft cheeks, brilliant scarlet lips, raven-black hair with a golden glint, a voice clear as a song, and a ringing laugh. .

But what did that help the King? He rode forward on the narrow path between the willows, and if the ground around him was no less marshy and damp than it had been before, at any rate it was no more so.